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*Dr Alexander Kohut*

# The Ethics of the Fathers

By  
DR. ALEXANDER KOHUT

*Edited and Revised by*  
DR. BARNETT A. ELZAS, M.D., LL.D.

With a Memoir and Appreciations by Various Writers



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TO  
REBEKAH KOHUT

Die reinen Frauen stehn im Leben  
Wie Rosen in dem dunklen Laub,  
Auf ihren Wünschen, ihrem Streben  
Liegt noch der feinste Blütenstaub.  
In ihrer Welt ist keine Fehle,  
Ist alles ruhig, voll und weich,  
Der Blick in eine Frauenseele  
Ist wie ein Blick in's Himmelreich. . . .

—*Julius Rodenberg*

“Many daughters have done valiantly,  
but thou excellest them all.”

—*Prov. xxxi, 29.*



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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Discourses in this volume were originally preached in German and created a furore at the time of their delivery. They were the author's first efforts in the American Jewish pulpit, which he so conspicuously adorned. Heard by very large audiences, they were eagerly read and discussed throughout the length and breadth of the land when they appeared, week by week, in the columns of *The American Hebrew*, in hastily-prepared translation by his friend Max Cohen, the Librarian of the then Maimonides Free Library. They were afterwards published in book form.

Though the utterances of a stranger, barely familiar with his new surroundings, his words have still a living message to American Jewry. This is the only reason for reprinting this little volume, that has been out of print for twenty years. It has been practically rewritten by the Editor, who has endeavored to be as true as

possible to the spirit of the original. He has taken the opportunity of correcting a number of typographical errors in the Talmudic quotations and the references to the same and has added numerous references omitted in the original. He has also supplied the Biblical references, for the sake of completeness.

That the spirited words of this gifted preacher, "Wielder of the Mighty Hammer" for Israel's faith, may continue to speak to us, is the earnest prayer of

THE EDITOR.

## MEMOIR OF ALEXANDER KOHUT

BY BARNETT A. ELZAS



ALEXANDER KOHUT, Rabbi, scholar, author, preacher and educator, was born in Félégyháza, Hungary, on April 22, 1842.\* He was a child of poverty, one of thirteen children. As a boy, we are told, he was strikingly beautiful, tall, of slender build, with big, expressive eyes, a gentle voice, of a singularly happy disposition and of magnetic personality. His father, Jacob, a man of vigorous constitution, who at the age of seventy walked from Kecskemét to Vienna to speak to the King and Kaiser whom he has served for many years, was a scholar of no mean attainments who spoke several languages fluently. His mother, Cecelia, was a pious and God-fearing woman, who did much to mould the character of her son. Like so many of the Jews in the village where he lived, the father

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\* The writer is indebted for the main facts of this sketch, to a biography of Alexander Kohut by Moses Reines, in his little volume. *Dor Vachachamav*, Cracow, 1890. This is largely autobiographical. Also to the In Memoriam pamphlet *Alexander Kohut, ein Charakterbild*, von Dr. Adolph Kohut.

was able to eke out only the barest existence by petty trading in the surrounding country, returning home week by week, in time for the Sabbath. This enforced absence from home made it impossible for him to supervise the education of his son. There were only a few Jews in Félégyháza and this village did not even possess an elementary school. Hence it happened that young Alexander reached the age of eight without even the rudiments of elementary learning.

Life in a Hungarian ghetto was no pleasant dream for the Jew in those days. *Hep, hep*, was a common cry. The year 1848 with its terrible storm and stress added greatly to his father's troubles, compelling him to move from place to place. In spite of these untoward conditions, the boy manifested marked intelligence and a strong desire for knowledge.

"The twig doth oft proclaim the tree," said the ancient Rabbis. As a boy, he already gave intimations of his future love of Jewish learning. While still a child, he constantly carried a Hebrew Bible with him, mumbling meaningless words, as he pretended to read the book of which he did not understand a single word. Observing this, his pious parents determined that their child should have an education at all costs.



Taking counsel with Eleazar Hoffman, the brother of Alexander's mother, his parents removed to the market town, Kecskemét. Here the boy was placed under the care of Rabbi Fischman and of Prof. Heinrich Deutsch, a friend of his father, principal of the Grammar School of that place, who was afterwards connected with the rabbinical Seminary in Buda Pesth. He studied hard and unceasingly, scarcely knowing the meaning of childhood. His progress was marked and rapid. Before his thirteenth year, he had not only completed the four classes of the Grammar School, but had acquired a good knowledge of the Bible, which he almost knew by heart. Under Deutsch's supervision, he studied also all that was necessary for the first two classes of the Gymnasium, so that he was able to enter the third class of the Gymnasium from the Grammar School. While at the Gymnasium, he received some financial help from his uncle, and continued his studies with Rabbi Fischman and Prof. Deutsch. He also received instruction in the Talmud from an old scholar, Rabbi Gershon Lövinger. These teachers of his youth he held in reverence to his dying day.

His father stimulated his love of learning by telling him stories of his forebears, who had become great and honored Rabbis in Israel. On one

occasion, he showed his son a volume of Responsa, entitled *Noda Bi'yhudah*.

"This volume," my son, "contains questions and answers by great Rabbis. All who are mentioned in this book are now immortal."

"Here you will find a question from my teacher, Rabbi Israel Palota, together with the answer of the author, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, of Prague. Rabbi Israel was my grand-father and I am called after him. Will *you* be as great as *your* grand-father some day?"

"I will try," answered the boy.

"Here is mentioned a great man, Rabbi Amram. He was my grand-uncle. He was a God-fearing man, who fasted four times a year from Friday to Friday. His great love for the Holy Land drew him thither with magic power. He left his country and went to Jerusalem. He became Rabbi of Safed, where he died."

"And here is another great man, Rabbi Hayim Kitssee. He was Rabbi in Erza. He was my great-grand-uncle. He received a small salary from his congregation, only enough for bread, but he managed to spare enough from his meager resources to buy much writing-paper. He was the author of several books: *M'kor Hayim*, *Derech Hayim*, *Torath Hayim* and *Mayim Hayim*."

By telling him these stories of the greatness of

his kinsfolk, the father fired the imagination and awakened the ambition of his son. The boy vowed that he, too, would some day be honored as a great Rabbi, and that he, too, would write many books. How well he kept his word, the world knows to-day.

Not long after this conversation with his father—young Kohut was then in his thirteenth year—an event took place which was destined to play a great part in his future career. He himself has told the story in a charming and most interesting bit of autobiography.\*

He was studying Talmud and Midrash with Prof. Deutsch. On one occasion, he was instructed to write an essay based on any subject selected from the Talmud. He was told that he would meet many unfamiliar, foreign words, and that he would find them fully explained in the *Aruch*, compiled by Moses Landau.

The name of Landau had always been held by him in special reverence. Had not Rabbi Ezekiel Landau immortalized the names of his parents and grandparents in his book? Thus it was that this young lad of thirteen began the study of the *Aruch*, which he hardly understood. Young as he was, however, he found the volume very

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\* See *A Chapter from My Life—The Origin of the Aruch Completum*, in *The American Hebrew*, Dec. 2, 1892.

deficient in its references and frequently erroneous in its etymologies. Meditating on a difficult talmudical passage which contained many foreign expressions, he tells us, he had sought help from Landau's *Aruch*—in vain. Then and there he made a solemn vow, that if God would give him wisdom, he would some day produce a complete lexicon, an *Aruch Shalem*, in which nothing would be missing. In this accident of his schooldays was laid the corner-stone of his monumental life-work.

The next few years were very fruitful for the young student. While pursuing his talmudic studies at Kecskemét, he continued at the same time his studies at the Gymnasium to the eighth class. He was not popular with his fellow-students. He was a strictly observant Jew and would not write on the Sabbath. The students sneered at him and made matters uncomfortable for him. At the examination, which included readings from Klopstock's *Messias*, wherever the *tetragrammaton* occurred, young Kohut substituted the word "God." He explained that it was against Jewish religious principles to make use of the Sacred Name. His explanation elicited the warmest commendation from the examiner.

Finding the Gymnasium at Kecskemét uncongenial, he went to Buda Pesth, entering the



last class of the Gymnasium, after which he would be able to enter the University. It was a fortunate move for him. Here he began the study of German; till now his studies had been conducted in Hungarian. This was in 1860, when it was a rare privilege to be allowed to enter as a student in the Gymnasium. He was the only student who was a strict Sabbath observer. He was excused from writing on the Sabbath. His teacher, Prof. Korsan, hated him and determined not to allow him to pass his examination. The District Superintendent, Dr. Luther, a friend of Prof. Korsan, who was to award the diplomas, selected the Sabbath for the examination in mathematics, announcing the fact that anyone who did not write on that day, would not be allowed to graduate. Dr. Luther became suddenly ill, however, and the examination had to be postponed till the following day. Kohut won his diploma *summa cum laude*.

Acting on the advice of his former teacher, Prof. Deutsch, who had meanwhile moved to Buda Pesth, Kohut prepared to enter the Breslau Theological Seminary, presided over by the famous Zacharias Frankel. Here he could obtain the necessary rabbinical knowledge which would enable him to write his talmudical lexicon, and at the same time acquire a knowledge of oriental languages.

Breslau in those days possessed a brilliant galaxy of professors. Here Frankel and Grätz and Bernays and Zuckerman directed Jewish studies. Schmidlers and Magnus lectured on Arabic. Little wonder that Breslau attracted the brilliant student. Young Kohut hurried home to consult his father and to receive his mother's blessing. His uncle promised him a monthly stipend of ten florins as long as he remained at Breslau, and before the Holydays he once more left his parents' house, his financial resources amounting to twenty florins.

Fasting and hungry, he came to Leipnik where he spent the New Year. Here Rabbi Bloch presided over the spiritual affairs of the community. Finding his way to the Synagogue, he listened with delight to the sermon of Rabbi Bloch and after the service he was invited, together with others, to the Rabbi's house. The following day, which was the Fast of Gedaliah, he proceeded on his journey and arrived in Breslau weak and fatigued. His purse now contained ten kreutzers. He proceeded at once to the house of Dr. Frankel who listened to what he had to say and promised him assistance. He gave him a room free in the garret of the Seminary which he shared with two other students. Theological students did not have the easy time in those days they

have now, when every kind of inducement is offered to attract them to rival institutions.

“This is the way that is becoming for the study of the Torah: a morsel of bread with salt thou must eat, and water by measure thou must drink; sleep, if needs be, upon the ground and live a life of trouble the while thou toilest in the Torah. If thou doest this, happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee.”\* These words might have been written of the student Kohut. During the first four years he spent in Breslau (1861–1865), there were for him literally more fasting-days than eating-days. Hunger was his constant companion. His daily meal was a half pint of milk and a roll. Meat he only ate on the Sabbath. The ten florins subvention from his uncle soon ceased, but he received a new stipend of two thalers weekly. At the annual examination of the Seminary, a prize of a hundred florins was awarded to the most diligent student. Kohut won this prize four times in succession. He earned an extra three thalers a month by giving lessons. Out of this he now paid his rent, his University fees, and bought books. His stipend of two thalers a month he lost through an unfortunate occurrence. He had gone to a book auction and invested five thalers—his entire fortune—in books

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\* *Ethics of the Fathers*, Chap. vi.

which he needed for the purpose of study. His purchase being observed by a Director of the *Livyas Chen* Association, that gentleman reported that if he were rich enough to buy such expensive books, he did not need a stipend, and the stipend was withheld!

In his fifth year at Breslau, he devoted his attention to talmudic and rabbinical knowledge with a view of becoming a preacher. His first position was at Tarnowitz, in Upper Silesia, where he preached on the Holydays and on special occasions. He was elected while still a student at the Seminary. His salary was a hundred thalers. Out of this he supported himself for the whole year and even managed to give some assistance to his younger brother, Adolph—later one of Germany's most prominent writers—who had come to Breslau to finish his theological education. He received his rabbinical diploma in 1867, after he had studied in the Seminary for five years and four months. He was the first student graduated from that Institution, under Frankel's régime, in less than seven years. We are told that one of his fellow-students complained of this to Frankel—he had been there ten years and had not yet received the coveted diploma, while Kohut had received it in five. "You are mistaken," said Frankel, "Kohut has been here more than seven

years. You have forgotten the nights. Kohut turned his nights into days for the purpose of study and he must receive credit for these.”

In 1864, at the age of twenty-two, Kohut received his doctor's diploma from the University of Leipzig. His thesis was entitled—*Jewish Angelology and Demonology in Their Relation to Parseeism*. The distinguished Professor of Oriental Languages at the University, Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer, was so pleased with it that he wrote to the author congratulating him upon his work, stating that the Faculty had decided to excuse him from his oral examination and to nominate him for the degree of Ph.D. *honoris causa*. This thesis was soon printed by the *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* in their Transactions.\* It elicited the warmest praise from many well-known scholars and investigators.

Kohut's name was now well established for scholarship. His lectures were everywhere well received. He continued his studies at Tarnowitz, always with a single aim in view—the completion of his *Aruch*. He had to supplement his meagre income by writing for the *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* and for scientific papers in the Hungarian language. His writings

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\* It is interesting to note that this thesis has just been re-issued in a limited edition in anastatic reprint by the Society.



in the Hungarian language attracted widespread attention.

In 1867, he was invited to preach and elected Rabbi of the congregation at Stuhlweissenburg, in Hungary. It was the love of fatherland, a trait that characterized him through life, that induced him to accept this call. Though he had not spoken the Hungarian language for six years, his sermons made a profound impression. His great knowledge and fine appreciation of the Hungarian classics established his name throughout Hungary. He was appointed School Director of the District by the Cultusminister Eötvös. It was at this time that Eötvös called a Convention of the Jews of Hungary for the purpose of discussing their affairs. Kohut was appointed Secretary of the Convention. He continued to write for various papers and published his volume *A Critical Survey of the Persian Translation of the Pentateuch*, by Jacob ben Joseph Tawus. With all his duties, he continued to work steadily at his *Aruch*. He was now ready for his great life's task.

#### IN SEARCH OF A PUBLISHER

Kohut was now twenty-six years of age, a man little experienced in the ways of the world. He had planned his great masterpiece, which was to appear in sixteen large volumes, but where was the

money to come from with which to publish it? To print the work as planned would require 30,000 florins. A rich Jew, Baron von Popper, had undertaken to defray the cost of publication to the letter  $\pi$ , but failed to keep his promise. Here was a serious obstacle at the outset, but Kohut was not deterred. He submitted parts of his work to famous scholars of the day, to Frankel in Breslau, to Zunz and Geiger in Berlin and to Buber in Lemberg. All of these scholars looked upon his undertaking with favor and encouraged him to continue.

An important event in his life took place at this time, his marriage to Julia Weissbrunn. She was a lovable woman, to whom no sacrifice was too great. It was she who was his comfort and mainstay during the many years of care and anxiety that were to follow.

To finish his work more quickly, Kohut decided to write his book in Hebrew. It would occupy only half the space that it would if written in German—eight volumes instead of sixteen. With remarkable perseverance he rewrote his work from the very beginning in Hebrew—the text in Hebrew and the translation in German. Again he submitted specimens for examination to the scholars, who differed in their opinions. Prof. Joseph Derenbourg advised him to publish only

the Vocabulary, without any Appendix, but Buber, his intimate friend, advised him to print the whole work in Hebrew. Buber's opinion prevailed. So the work had to be rewritten once more—surely a gigantic task, demanding heroic energy and courage.

The death of his father-in-law and of a son in infancy were a severe blow to him, but his energy continued unabated. Never for a single moment did he lose sight of the goal. The first volume of his *magnum opus* was ready for the press in 1878. Kohut was author, proofreader, correspondent and bookseller. In order to publish his first volume, he had sold all of value that he possessed. The Royal Academy of Vienna recognised the value of his work for Science and assisted him with a subvention of 400 florins. But his subscribers were few and altogether insufficient to defray the cost. A friend advised him to dedicate the second volume to Baron de Hirsch, who was a generous contributor to educational enterprises and who would doubtless be glad to do something for Jewish Science. He consulted friends in Paris, but they gave him little encouragement. They discouraged him, in fact, advising him against coming to Paris. Before their letters reached him, however, he was already on the road. They were sent to him in Brussels. He changed

his plans, and on the advice of Dr. Neubauer, of Oxford, went to London. Dr. Nathan Adler, the Chief Rabbi, received him in friendly fashion and gave him a letter of introduction to Sir Moses Montefiore, to whom he decided to dedicate his second volume. Dr. Neubauer, who had come especially from Oxford to meet him, accompanied him to the train which was to carry him to Ramsgate, where Sir Moses lived in princely style. He made him a present of four shillings, enough to pay his fare to Ramsgate.

It was Christmas eve and the cars were crowded with travellers, returning to spend the day with their families. The journey seemed endless. He had not eaten that day, thinking that the trip was a short one and that he would surely be invited to dine with Sir Moses. The snow was falling when he arrived. Dr. Adler had instructed him to leave the train at Broadstairs and to present his letter of introduction to Dr. Loewe, the Secretary to Sir Moses, who would doubtless accompany him to Ramsgate and act as his interpreter. The train arrived at Broadstairs at 2 P.M. He at once went to Dr. Loewe's house. Unfortunately for him, Dr. Loewe had just been operated on and could not be seen. He was directed to the residence of Sir Moses which was not far away.

Discouraged, cold and hungry, he arrived at last, only again to be disappointed. Presenting his letter of introduction, he was denied admission and told to come again in a few days. With a heart full of anguish and almost in despair, he departed. The place which he had pictured as a door of hope was turned for him into a vale of sorrow.

His return trip nearly cost him his life. Making his way to the railway station, he had to wait several hours for the train. Mistaking the whistle of an engine going in the opposite direction for his own train—it was now dark—he fell down a steep embankment and came near being crushed to death under the wheels of the train. He fortunately escaped with a few bruises. He arrived in London after midnight. In the morning he went to see Dr. Adler and recited the story of his adventures on the previous day. Dr. Adler was profoundly touched and asked his secretary to accompany him to Dr. Asher, the almoner of the Rothschilds. The latter gave him £20 for five copies of the *Aruch*. Dr. Adler secured him a few subscribers, but the main object of his visit to London was not achieved.

Against the advice of his friends, Kohut now went to Paris. Chief Rabbi Isidore and Rabbi Zadoc Kahn were most friendly disposed. But

everywhere he went it was the same story—"We are not interested in Jewish Science." His appeal to the wealthy had been in vain and he sought no further for a patron to whom to dedicate his second volume. When published, he inscribed it to Dr. Grætz and Dr. Zuckerman on their fiftieth anniversary. But there was soon to be a turn in his fortune. The next chapter of his life was to be written in America, which was to see the completion of his great work and of his life's task.

#### IN AMERICA

Congregation Ahawath Chesed, of New York, had lost its well-beloved and brilliant Rabbi, Dr. Adolph Huebsch, in 1884, and for many months had sought a successor to its pulpit. It was most fortunate in its choice. A call was extended to Kohut, now acknowledged as one of the profoundest talmudic and oriental scholars in Europe. He was at that time Rabbi at Grosswardein, in Hungary. He had previously served with eminent success, congregations at Stuhlweissenburg and Fünfkirchen. In each of these latter cities he remained for eight years. His fame as an orator was widespread and prior to his call to New York, he was elected to the Hungarian Parliament as representative of the Jews. He never took his



seat, however, owing to the fact of his leaving for America. His character and reputation are admirably portrayed in the following Extract from the Testimonial presented to him by his Congregation on leaving Grosswardein.

DEAR PASTOR:—

“Your letter read to-day at the Meeting of the Representatives of our community, wherein you ask to be released from your office as Rabbi and express your resolution to leave our beloved fatherland, has filled us with the deepest grief, as we see destroyed the lofty expectations we linked with your activity.

“The pulpit of our temple becomes orphaned and our children lament their teacher, whom they loved to adoration. We lose our greatly-admired pastor, the effective promoter of our idealistic efforts and our fatherly friend. Our native country and its Judaism lose the victorious defender of threatened human rights and liberties. Our congregation weeps for their pride and Hungarian Judaism for its greatest pulpit orator and its most prominent scholar.

“We should despair at the great loss we are about to sustain, were it not that by your teaching we have learned that man, afflicted by manifold misfortunes, should still submit to the will of God; if we were not convinced that our loss will be the gain of our coreligionists in the New World, and if we were not assured that in the land of liberty you will have opened to you a vast field of activity, worthy of the gigantic power you possess for the cultivation of Jewish

Science, and for the triumph of humanitarian ideas. With feelings of great sorrow we accept your resolution to leave us and our country. . . .

“A painful farewell to our greatly-beloved and honored pastor, and happiness to the messenger of God to American Judaism.”

Kohut arrived in New York on May 3, 1885. The joy of his new Congregation was unbounded. His arrival was everywhere acclaimed with the utmost enthusiasm. A new light had come to American Israel.

Judaism in America was in parlous estate. The scientific spirit of the day was manifest in all the affairs of life. The writings of Lyell, Büchner, Moleschott, Charles Darwin, Tyndall and Spencer, which had played havoc with the Church, was playing no less havoc with the Synagogue. Indifference to all things Jewish prevailed everywhere. Ethical Culture, Christian Science, Spiritualism and the various occult movements were winning an ever-increasing number of adherents from within the ranks of Judaism. In some Reform pulpits, the cherished traditions of Israel were openly flouted and a dangerous Universalism was being preached. The Abrahamic Covenant was denounced as a relic of barbarism, a Sunday Sabbath advocated and the dietary laws declared to be only antiquated superstitions. The latest

seeing that he was already ninety-nine years old and childless? And yet be believed in God and deemed his trust his greatest virtue. (Gen. xv, 6.) והאמין בה' ויחשביה לו צדקה. He served God from pure love. He loved God as a child loves its father. His love was not that of slavish fear. Only one excels this man of faith, who from love of God was willing to sacrifice what was dearest to him—his only son. That man was Moses, who brought a still greater sacrifice. Not because he *died* for his people, but because he *lived* for them. His courage to live was the bravest sacrifice.

To lay down one's life for a great idea is by no means as noble a thing as to live for it, in the face of deprivation, calumny and apparent failure. The founder of Christianity, the daughter of Judaism, became great *only through his death*. Moses became great *through his life*, through his unremitting effort to develop a nation of slaves into a nation of moral men. His example, which enabled his people, despite a world of adversaries, torn from its national soil, to maintain itself by the strength of the religious idea, exercised the greatest influence on the development of humanity. And how did Moses teach the people the love of the religious idea? His final exhortation to them furnishes the answer. "And now, Israel, what

doth the Lord, thy God, require of thee but to *fear* Him, to walk in all His ways, to *love* him and to serve Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deut. x, 12.)

But it may be asked: Is not too much here required? Can more be demanded than the fear and love of God with entire heart and soul? The question already suggested itself to our Talmudists, who asked: אטו יראת שמים מילתא זוטרתא היא?—"Is the fear of God so small a matter, that Moses seems to take it as a matter of course?"—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear him?" They answer: אין, לגבי משה מילתא זוטרתא היא — "Yes," in the eyes of Moses, the fear of God was an easy matter." <sup>20</sup>

I must admit that the answer at first sight seems unsatisfactory. We may ask here in Talmudic phrase: אטו כל עלמא מיגמר גמירא?—"Is the whole world composed of learned men?" Is all Israel composed of spiritual masters like Moses? If the fear of God was so easy a matter to Moses, which he was justified in requiring of his people, could every one of them aspire to his high level of spiritual culture and his deep inner faith?

But after what has been said, the difficulty is easily solved. The lower grade of divine service—

to bury their living freight in a watery grave. Picture us as we encountered shoals and icebergs. Not only did I escape these dangers, they served me as a lesson to my eldest son who murmured in his despair: "Is it because there were no graves in Hungary, that thou hast taken us away to die in the bosom of the sea?" I answered him: "This, my child, will enable you to comprehend the inspired words of the Psalmist: 'They that go down to the sea in ships—these see the works of the Lord.' I have also traversed the wilderness of an anti-Semitic land. I have been sick at the sight of European intolerance toward my brethren; and I have freed myself from the shackles of physical and spiritual slavery with which the Jew in my country is fettered. I now give expression to my four-fold thanksgiving. Our sacrifices were mutual. You, instead of selecting a leader from your immediate surroundings, honored me, a stranger from a foreign country. I sacrificed the ties of friendship, fatherland and a seventy-seven year old mother. Your part of the sacrifice I fully appreciate. Instead of building a temple, as is so often the case in Europe, to be a house of God only—without its human worshippers—you have built a magnificent edifice to the glory of the God of Israel, sanctifying it by your presence, for 'Ye stand this day, all of you, before the Lord, your God: your elders and your officers, your little ones, your wives and the stranger that is in your camp.'

"The country whence I came differs from America in this, that in the former, great sacri-

fices are made to preserve God's altars, but the worshippers are missing. Their hearts lack the impulse of Religion. This temple, and especially this great congregation, testify unmistakably to the true spirit of God among you. Do not forget, however, that while Solomon's temple was beautiful, Jeremiah declared that 'you alone must become the temple of God.' God's spirit dwells in human hearts, and this I have already had manifested to me in your frank, humble spirit, and this is, in truth, the foundation of your beautiful temple.

"I trust that the union that existed between my lamented predecessor and yourselves may continue with me. I shall always open my heart to you and shall always deal with you in a spirit of candor and truth. A narrow conception and enforcement of truth, so-called, has led to more disaster in the world than war or poison. Truth, in Religion, is doing God's will. I consider that to be the truth which is taught by the rabbinical Jewish doctrine, but usages which cannot be based on the teaching of the Talmud, I reject. The presentation of the Jewish faith to the outside world must be delicately done. I offer you the old and the new in happy and blended union. At times you may find that I shall differ from you. I ask you to bear with me as I shall bear with you. Tolerance is not general in Europe, but is a child of free America. Rabbis must walk in peace and truth and you will always find me an apostle of peace. I trust that I shall be welcomed as a brother by my fellow Rabbis and join in fraternal union with them."



Three weeks after delivering his inaugural sermon, Kohut commenced a series of sermons on *The Ethics of the Fathers*, in which he elaborated his standpoint. Speaking of the opening words of the Ethics, he remarked:

“The chain of tradition continued unbroken from Moses through Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets and the Men of the Great Synagogue, to the latest times. Upon this tradition rests our faith, which Moses first received from God on Sinai. On this foundation rests Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism to-day. On this foundation we stand. Whoever denies this—denies this on principle—disclaims his connection with the bond of community of the house of Israel.

“Let it be well observed, I say, *denies this on principle*, because there are many who do not observe this or that ordinance of Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism, who cannot or will not apply it to the exigencies of life, yet grant that these laws are applicable to the conditions of modern existence. Even the most pious Jew cannot observe all of the 613 laws with their infinite applications and amplifications. . . . Many laws, mandatory and prohibitory, lapse by their very nature or by the decree of God, under certain designated contingencies . . . I would comfort those whose hearts are grieved at the thought that they cannot fulfil the whole of the Law . . . Not everyone should be condemned who cannot observe all the laws with equal fidelity—taking for granted, however,

that he acknowledges the binding character of the Law. Only he who denies this, who rejects on principle the validity of the Mosaic-rabbinical tradition, thereby banishes himself from the camp of Israel, writes his own epitaph: 'I am no Jew, no adherent to the faith of my fathers.' He denies that Moses received the Torah on Sinai and handed it down to Joshua, etc. . . . he has ceased to be a Jew and is a Karaite." \*

We have quoted Kohut at length, because the quotation gives a clear and definite statement of his standpoint. This sermon was at once seized upon by Dr. Kohler, the protagonist of Reform, as a peg on which to hang a massive yet illuminating exposition of Reform Judaism in five Discourses, which were afterwards reprinted in pamphlet form.†

Kohut replied in a dignified way. He had not invented the idea of an Oral Law existing side by side with the Written Law. Such had been accepted by the ages. He had not challenged anyone, but was merely expounding his own standpoint to his own congregation. "Who authorizes radical Reform," he asks effectively, "to discard Mosaic Judaism, to despise rabbinical Judaism and teach only a prophetic Judaism? And who

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\* Kohut *The Ethics*, pp. 7 *et seq.*

† Kohler, *Backwards or Forwards*, New York, 1885.

has ceded the right to radical Reform to declare that prophetical Judaism has parted company with Mosaism? . . . Let them not bring forward their prophetical Judaism, for radical Reform would be inextricably entangled in a thousand contradictions. . . . American Judaism cannot wish to be, nor can it be an isolated Judaism . . . Progress must know its limitations . . . The denial of everything is no standpoint.”

Kohut's defence, from his standpoint, was conclusive, though his comparison of Reform to Karaism was without adequate justification. The controversy was discussed through the length and breadth of the land. The Reformers were not slow to find the weak points in Kohut's position. Was he not himself inconsistent? The successor of Huebsch, he was occupying a Reform pulpit. His congregation certainly did not measure up to the standard which he had laid down. His members did not observe the Sabbath, nor did they keep the dietary laws. In the temple the sexes sat together and instrumental music was utilised in the services. The second days of the Festivals had been abolished. Hanukkah and Purim and the Feast of Tabernacles had fallen into desuetude. The reading of the Law did not follow traditional custom. The Prayer Book was by no means orthodox; it contradicted in fact most of the

things for which orthodoxy stood.\* Was he not a Reformer in fact, if not in his preaching?

Perhaps Kohut *was* inconsistent. But it must be remembered that he had been but a few weeks in America and was unfamiliar with conditions save in a general way. He was, indeed, more orthodox than his congregation, but he hoped to win it back to conservatism. Soon after his arrival, he reintroduced the observance of the Festivals of Hanukkah and Purim and Sukkoth, and the reading of the Law again followed traditional methods in his temple. He was in fact a conservative Reformer, "offering the old and the new in happily-blended union." If he was inconsistent, he was no more so than the ancient Rabbis who, in the exigencies of their time, did not hesitate to abrogate even provisions of the Mosaic Law itself. Like them, he found justification in the Psalmist's utterance: "It is a time to act for God, when men are breaking His Law." To sum up his position in a word, he sought neither "the way of fire" nor "the way of snow," to walk in either of which, according to the parable of the ancients, meant death. He sought "the middle

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\* It is claimed that Kohut never saw the Prayer Book compiled by his predecessor prior to his arrival in America. Inasmuch, however, as he continued to use it without protest and later even put it into English garb for the use of his congregation, we must assume that he regarded the *form* of the Prayer Book as non-essential.

way," to walk in which meant life.\* His was the standpoint of his teacher Zacharias Frankel. It was the standpoint later assumed by Schechter, the Moses Mendelssohn of our time, which standpoint, however, is as much an abomination to the orthodox fanaticism of our day as was that of Kohut to the radical Reform of his.

The Kohler-Kohut controversy, which began purely as a local matter, was destined to produce far-reaching results. Kohut had put Reform on the defensive. Reform had now a foe-man worthy of its steel, whose ever-increasing influence it was felt necessary to combat. It was directly due to this controversy that the now historic Pittsburgh Conference was called into being in November, 1885. This Conference cleared the atmosphere. Its "Declaration of Independence" did not find general acceptance among the Reformers themselves—Jastrow, Szold, Gottheil and Aaron Wise raised their voices in mighty protest against it. But the Conference had far-reaching results, for it gave the impetus to the foundation of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, which was intended to counteract the influence of the Hebrew Union College, which had been established at Cincinnati in 1875.

The moving spirit in the establishment of the

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\* Jerus. Hagigah, beginning of Chap. 2.

Seminary was the late Sabato Morais, of Philadelphia. Together with him, Kohut labored unceasingly with voice and pen. The Seminary was launched at a meeting of Ministers in New York, on January 31st, 1886. To this Institution, Kohut gave loyal and devoted service to his dying day.

In the midst of his many duties, his work on the *Aruch* was somewhat interfered with. The death of his wife, the beloved companion of his youth, on March 6, 1886, at the early age of thirty-three, was a sad blow to him. She had been an ideal wife to him during the many years of his trials. To enable him to devote himself entirely to his ministerial duties and to his literary labors, she had refrained from all social amusements which would withdraw him from his occupations. Nothing was too hard for her to help him complete his life-work. She had brought up a large family—ten children—eight of whom survived her. The death of Peter Smolenskin, too, who had been his friend, literary adviser, and defender,\* and who had supervised the publication of the first four volumes of the *Aruch* in Vienna, increased his difficulties. Smolenskin it was who had inter-

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\* See his reply to I. H. Weiss' criticism of Kohut in his *Beth Talmud* in the pamphlet *Mishpat la'ashukim*, reprinted from the *Hashachar*, Vol. X, Vienna, 1881.



ested many in Kohut's work and it is no exaggeration to say that had it not been for him, the *Aruch* might never have been published.

The first volume had been published in Vienna, in 1878; the second in 1880; the third in 1882 and the fourth in 1884. Four years passed between the publication of the fourth and fifth volumes. The fifth volume appeared in 1889; the sixth in 1890 and the seventh and eighth, as well as the Supplement, in 1892. The expense of the fifth volume was defrayed by Mr. Jacob H. Schiff at the instigation of Dr. Gottheil of Temple Emanuel, who promised that if Kohut's congregation would pay for the sixth volume, he would interest his friends to defray the cost of publication of the seventh and eighth. Thus was his life-long ambition to be realized at last. For nearly twenty-five years he had labored at his desk from twelve to fourteen hours a day and the consummation of his life's work was in sight.

In his *In Memoriam* tribute, Adolph Kohut has given us a vivid and beautiful picture of his brother at work. It is so unconventional and so unique that we reproduce it here.

“Year in year out could have been seen a youthful maiden who, scarce observed by the tireless worker, would noiselessly enter his room at 3 A.M. and bring him food. He

would take it mechanically, never allowing himself to be disturbed in his work. It was his daughter Valerie. . . . .

"The great event of his life took place on May 14, 1889, when at 1 A.M. he saw his great work completed in manuscript. Suffering physically, his eyes aglow, a look of unexpressible joy illumined his features.

"Raising himself from his chair, he offered up a fervent prayer. This concluded, "Children, come up," he cried, and they all came. They had long been expecting the call. At the dinner table he had requested them not to go to bed, for the completion of his work might at any time be announced to them. Taking the hand of each of his children in turn, he wrote the last words, guiding their hands and addressing a few heartfelt words to each. His daughter Valerie wrote the last word—she who had been his good genius for so many years. "My dearest Valerie," he said, "yours must be a special reward, for you have done for me more than all your brothers and sisters. Yours shall be the concluding word. The last word was תִּתּוּרָא — *titura* — "bridge." "You were my bridge between life and death. Had you not looked after my physical wants, my light might long ago have been extinguished." He kissed his children and wept . . . . .

It was a herculean task that he had thus brought to completion. On the slender foundation of Nathan b. Jehiel's *Aruch*, originally printed in 1477, he erected his monumental literary building in eight volumes, containing 4000 double-columned

pages, with an Index and supplementary volume. His was largely an independent work. It was based on seven manuscripts of the *Aruch* which he critically edited, with philological explanations from cognate and other foreign languages. His biblical, talmudic and midrashic quotations are given with careful exactness. He gives exhaustive references to the old sources from which Nathan b. Jehiel drew, and many of his articles of general cultural interest are almost monographs in their completeness. The Index, in nineteen chapters, is a remarkable specimen of scholarly industry. And he did all this in the midst of a busy life as Rabbi, Preacher, Pastor and Educator.

In the latter years of his life his iron constitution had given way, but his indomitable will conquered all physical disabilities. How he shames us of the latter day with our petty ideals and self-centered ambitions! All honor to the Imperial Academy of Science in Vienna, the Royal Hungarian Academy of Science in Buda Pesth, the Royal Prussian Cultus-Ministerium in Berlin, Baron Rothschild and Baron Königswarter in Vienna, Sir Moses Montefiore in England, Jacob H. Schiff and his other patrons in New York and especially the members of the Congregation Ahawath Chesed for the noble part they played in its production, for without

their assistance the work could never have been completed.

The most prominent Jewish and Christian scholars of the Old and New World recognized Kohut's work as epoch-making. Buber, in a prefatory letter which is printed in the first volume, speaks of the work in the highest terms. Berliner, in his *Lexicography of the Talmud*, pays tribute to its excellence. Delitzsch declared that it would take a hundred years before the full value of Kohut's *Aruch* would be appreciated. Prof. Friedrich Müller pronounced it a Monument of Science. Brüll, Smolenskin, Grætz, Renan, Barth, Kautsch and Ascoli praised it in superlative terms.

His great work finished, Kohut's happiness was boundless. His great dream had been realized, the child of his waking and sleeping hours. His family rejoiced that he had come back to them, for his work had made a recluse of him. The hardships of his earlier days had made vigorous inroads upon his constitution and signs of a general break-down were beginning to manifest themselves. His family urged him to rest. The advice was heeded, but not for long. Work had become second nature for him and he could not long remain idle. From this time on, he made numerous substantial scientific contributions to learned

periodicals and Transactions. He was a frequent contributor to the Jewish papers. He collected material for a History of Neo-Hebraic Literature and for a Persian-Talmudic Glossary. He conducted a vast correspondence with scholars in all parts of the world. Not that he had been idle while his *Aruch* was in course of publication. While in Europe, scarcely a year passed without some notable volume or essay from his pen. He translated the Bible into Hungarian. In 1885, he published his volume on *The Ethics of the Fathers*, a second series of which appeared in the columns of *The American Hebrew* and many of his articles appeared in contemporary papers, as e.g., *The Independent*.\*

As a preacher, he continued popular to the end. Tall, well-knit, of slender frame and of graceful, easy carriage, his eyes flashing a vivid commentary upon his words, in manner reserved, and without the elocutionist's tricks, an orator of power, his sermons, always carefully prepared, found a mark in the hearts of his hearers. When he came to New York in 1885, he had only a moderate knowledge of English, but in a short time he wrote and spoke fluently in that language. He pos-

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\* For a Bibliography of the writings of Dr. Kohut, see *Tributes to the Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut*, New York, 1894. See also Lippe's *Biographical Lexicon*, 3 vols. 1881-1899.

sessed, in addition, a thorough knowledge of many European and oriental languages.

As a man, he was ideal—"a man through and through," as the Rabbis have it. His word was his bond. Insincerity was utterly foreign to his nature and the "Categorical Imperative" was his guide in life. In the Seminary which he had been largely instrumental in establishing, he never lost his interest. Stricken with his last illness, he dragged himself to the class-room to give instruction to the students and when he could no longer leave his bed, he taught the students in his own room. Even when his eyesight failed him, he continued to teach them. For these students he made many a sacrifice and many a one who found himself in need, found the master ever ready to help him. Almost ascetic in his own wants, struggling Talmudists, of whom there was never a scarcity, could always count upon his assistance, though he generally received little thanks for his benefactions.

Apart from his *Aruch*, his family and Science, nothing appealed so much to him as his books. He was a great book-lover as well as book collector. His library was one of the finest in America. In 1893, when the doctors told him that it was necessary for him to submit to an operation, he begged that the operation might be performed



in his study, in the presence of his books, his best friends. His request could not be complied with and when the doctors left him, he made his way on crutches to his beloved study and wept. He was a modest man, ever ready to do justice to others. In commending scholars to the consideration of others, he was often exuberant in his expression of praise and many a scholar of mediocre attainment he called a *Talmid Haham*. He had learned from bitter experience what struggle meant.

Specially noteworthy were his piety and reverence. His piety he manifested as son and pupil. He regarded his parents with a feeling akin to worship. He made repeated journeys from America to Kecskemét to receive the blessing of his old mother, who died in September, 1895, in her eighty-eighth year, and often locked himself in his room for hours at a time and wept before the picture of his father, who had died in his seventy-fifth year. He always carried his father's tobacco-box with him, and some earth from Jerusalem. In 1890, when he went to Europe, he brought back with him some soil from his father's grave, which he treasured. He honored all great men in Israel and held in greatest reverence his early Talmud teachers, Rabbi Fischman and Rabbi Gershon Lövinger. To Frankel and

Grætz he was devotedly attached. A word of praise from his former teachers made him supremely happy. He corresponded with his teachers of Orientalia at the Breslau University, Schmölders and Magnus, to the day of their death, and often exchanged letters with the Sanskrit scholar Benfey, the Phœnician philologist Levy, and with the distinguished Oriental scholars, Delitzsch, Haug, Krehl, Steinschneider and F. Max Müller.

The dedications of his volumes were characteristic and noteworthy. His second volume he inscribed to Doctors Grætz and Zuckerman, his third to the memory of his father, his fourth to Zunz, his fifth to Jacob H. Schiff, his sixth to Congregation Ahawath Chesed, his seventh to his father-in-law, Rabbi Bettelheim, and his eighth to various patrons of Jewish Science. His last work, entitled *Light of Shade and Lamp of Wisdom*, he dedicated to his friend and physician, Dr. Isaac Adler, of New York.

His scholarship and character made him friends throughout the world. To name only a few of the innumerable eminent men with whom he stood in intimate relation, might be mentioned: Baron Joseph von Eötvös, Cultus Minister of Hungary, Count Melchior von Lonyay, the Hungarian Minister of Finance, Koloman von Tisza, Cardinal and

Archbishop Haynald, the Bishop of Fünfkirchen, Ferdinand Dulansky, Prof. M. Lazarus, Rabbi Jellinek, Professor Chwolson and Ernest Renan.

He was a born expounder of the Word and shepherd of his flock, his gentle nature ever striving after peace, even with those who opposed him. Above everything he dreaded polemics, in which he rarely engaged. His home life was ideal. In his family he was a child with his children, in whose mirth and abandon he spent many happy hours.

But his happiness was soon to come to an end, and his life's work. The long-threatened breakdown came at last. In vain he sought to recover his health in Karlsbad and submitted to operation in New York. It was too late. His congregation offered him a protracted vacation and his family and friends begged him to spare himself, but in spite of his growing infirmities he continued to preach. He bore his sufferings with fortitude and resignation and frequently discussed the question of Immortality with his family.

On March 20, 1894, New York was startled by the announcement of the death of the Hungarian patriot, Louis Kossuth. Though racked with pain, memories of the old home awakened in him such patriotic sentiments that he felt

that he must go to the Temple on Saturday morning. He had promised his family not to speak. The service concluded, however, he approached the pulpit, and instead of the customary benediction, he delivered a glowing address on Kossuth and his relation to Judaism. The last words had scarcely left his lips, when he fainted and had to be carried home. He lingered but a few weeks and on May 25, 1894, his life's work was completed.

Thus died this beloved Rabbi, scholar and patriot. In his clasped hands, when he was consigned to rest, lay the Index to his *Aruch*. He was comparatively young when he died, only fifty-two. Though full of trial and tribulation, his life had not been without its sweet satisfactions. He had seen his ambitions realized and felt that he had labored for eternity.

The funeral was a remarkable demonstration of his people's love and esteem. Jewish ministers from other cities joined their New York colleagues in paying tribute to his eminent learning and virtues. Similar tributes came from distinguished men throughout the world. These tributes were collected by his son, George Alexander Kohut, and published by Congregation Ahawath Chesed.\*

Shortly after his death, numerous scientific

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\* *Tributes to the Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut.* Published by Congregation Ahawath Chesed, New York, 1894.

works appeared, inscribed to his memory, by the famous Arabian traveller, Dr. Eduard Glaser, Dr. L. Rosenthal, Dr. A. Harkavy, Dr. A. Neubauer and Solomon Buber.\* A large Memorial Volume,† written in many languages and edited by his son, was published in 1897. This volume included learned monographs by the foremost scholars of Europe and America. It is a veritable Pantheon of Jewish Science, a monument that will outlast rude brass and polished stone.

But not by his contributions to Jewish Science alone, eminent though they were, will Alexander Kohut, scholar and teacher of scholars, be best remembered; nor by his gifts as a Jewish preacher, great though they were; nor even by the valiant service he rendered by inspiring anew those who sought to strengthen the conservative spirit of Judaism in America. "Greater is he who inspires others to action," say the Sages, "than he who does great things himself." Alexander Kohut left living memorials of himself, who have continued the work he left unfinished.

He was twice happily married. His second wife, Rebekah, a daughter of Rabbi Dr. A. S. Bettelheim, of Baltimore, whom he married on February 14, 1887, is to-day one of America's greatest

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\* For a list of these works, see *The Menorah* for November, 1895.

† *Semitic Studies: in Memory of Alexander Kohut*, Berlin, 1897.

Jewish assets. Like her husband, she has ever been a tireless worker for all causes that make for Jewish uplift. Founder and Trustee of many civic and communal organizations, she is a member of the directorate of the leading religious and philanthropic institutions of New York. She was the first President of the New York section of the National Council of Jewish Women, of which she is now honorary President, and is still President of the Emanuel Sisterhood, an unfailing stimulus to noble endeavor.

George Alexander Kohut, the eldest son of Alexander Kohut, has maintained his family's tradition for learning. A mere list of his publications would fill many pages.

In his Will, Alexander Kohut requested that on the anniversary of his death each of his children, eight of whom survived him, should do some good deed and that some poor theological student be assisted, thus bringing to fulfilment the Biblical saying: "The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing." This request has been literally carried out.

Few men among us, in truth, have been more signally perpetuated. A year after his death, Congregation Ahawath Chesed erected a stately shaft of white marble at Linden Hill to his memory. In 1915, his son, George Alexander Kohut, him-



self a collector and lover of books, donated to Yale University a collection of books relating to Hebrew and Rabbinic literature collected by his father. This collection, which contains many rarities, consists mainly of books pertaining to Hebrew literature. Every department of Jewish learning is represented: the Talmud and its Commentaries and later Rabbinic works, including the literature of the *Responsa*, lexica, and hand-books covering a wide range of subjects; also several thousand books and pamphlets pertaining to Jewish life and literature, written in modern languages. Included in it is an unusually complete set of periodicals, in Hebrew and modern languages, bearing on the history and literature of the Jews. It is to be further enlarged by the donation of the remainder of the library now in George Alexander Kohut's possession—some 1500 volumes of printed books and about 100 MSS., many of them unique. Provision is to be made, likewise, for the acquisition of accessions from other noteworthy collections. Taken altogether, this will make the Yale Collection rank with the best of similar collections in America. The library is now completely catalogued and arranged, available for reference and original investigation.

In connection with the Kohut Library, there has

been established an Alexander Kohut Memorial Publication Fund, of \$7000, for the publication, in the Yale Oriental Series, of a number of volumes of Texts and Researches relating to Semitic studies. It is expected that at least one volume will be issued biennially. Several volumes have already appeared, the most recent being Clay's *Empire of the Amorites*. An important Arabic text, under the same auspices, is in the press.

In addition to these gifts, in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Alexander Kohut, a third has been added by George Alexander Kohut and other members of his family—a sum of \$11,000, the income of which is to provide a Fellowship for advanced study in the Department of Semitic Languages at Yale. This Kohut Fellowship is the first to be given specifically for Semitic study in an American University.

Thus is the name of Alexander Kohut firmly established among those who have enriched the world by their works—the noble band of those “who live in minds made better by their presence.” In our day of self-centred ambition, the example of this scholar who, utterly forgetful of self, lived for an ideal, will stand out in ever-increasing splendor as time goes on, an inspiration for future generations.



## ALEXANDER KOHUT'S CONTRIBUTION TO JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP

BY GOTTHARD DEUTSCH



ISAAC M. WISE said once, philologists are the driest and most narrow people, entirely devoid of all interest in any other branch of human knowledge.\* Plutarch, the classic of biography in parallels, could not have chosen a stronger illustration for the tendencies in the American rabbinate during its formative period in the second half of the nineteenth century than these two men, and could not have shown their essential difference more strikingly than in this statement, not penned with any idea of Kohut's work, but characteristic of the great organizer, full of energy, and impatient of details. Isaac M. Wise will in another fifty years be fully understood as the pathfinder of an American Judaism with an American rabbinate, both built on entirely original ideas. Alexander Kohut will stand as the last representative of the European ideal of scholarship as password into the

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\* *American Israelite*, Sept. 12, 1879, p. 4.

rabbinate, inasmuch as he was the last American rabbi called to the pulpit of a prominent congregation in the United States on the ground of scholarly reputation. It is highly characteristic of the necessity of qualifying every general statement, that Wise's remark on philological pedantry and one-sidedness does not apply to Kohut, who, with all his interest in the minutiae of Talmudic philology and in a literature which had at best only a historic interest, was a deeply poetical soul with truly catholic sympathies.

Two geographical facts are search-lights illuminating Kohut's life and achievement. He was born in Hungary and he studied at the Breslau Seminary.

Hungary entered very late into Jewish literary history but soon conquered for itself a leading place. No Jewish author is known to have come from Hungary until the eighteenth century,\* and up to the middle of the nineteenth century the important rabbimates, both of the orthodox and the liberal congregations, were filled with men called from Germany or from the neighboring provinces of Austria. Moses Sofer in Presburg (1762-1839) and Leopold Loew in Papa, Kanizsa

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\* This is broadly speaking, though Isaac of Tyrnau of the fifteenth century may be quoted, but he is not a man of any consequence and may not have been a native of Hungary.

and Szegedin (1811–1875), will illustrate this statement. The seed sown in this land has borne a hundredfold. The leading orthodox congregations and colleges of Europe, Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfort-on-the-Main, London, etc., as well as prominent liberal congregations and colleges, have for years been filled by men of Hungarian birth and early Hungarian training. It is safe to say that the rabbinical Seminary of Budapest has, in the forty years\* of its existence, contributed more to solid Jewish learning than any other of its sister institutions. It is also characteristic, that at the time of its opening, it called two of its professors† from Austria, while since that time it has always succeeded in filling its vacant chairs with its own graduates and still had a supply for other institutions.

A new era began for the Jews of Hungary in 1840 when the Diet took up the question of their civic improvement. Progressive elements, prominent among them Leopold Loew, a native of Moravia, advocated Magyarization. This meant progress towards secular culture. At the same time, the numerous congregations with their old-fashioned *Yeshibahs*, furnished an inexhaustible supply of young men well versed in rabbinic

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\* It was opened in 1877.

† David Kaufmann (1852–1899) and Moses Bloch (1815–1909).



literature and filled with intense Jewish sentiment. Kohut, born in a Magyar district of the polyglot country, at a time when transformation from the isolation of the Jews into the assimilation with the Magyar element was eagerly discussed, was thus from his earliest childhood impressed with the importance of cultural differences and the process of their amalgamation, and so he was predestined as an eager observer to turn his attention to the investigation of scientific "Grenzgebiete." To this he devoted his life.

The Alma Mater of Breslau was of equal, if not of greater, influence on Kohut than the home environment in the *Yeshibah* of Rabbi S. H. Fischman of Kecskemét (1822-1879), who, from what I know of him,\* belonged, like his better-known brother, R. Feisch Fischman, preacher in Presburg (1821-1881),† and his brother-in-law, Marcus Amram Hirsch (1833-1909), Chief Rabbi of Prague and Hamburg, to the progressive wing of orthodoxy, characterized by a friendlier attitude to secular education, though opposed to a professional training for the rabbinate in the

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\* He refused once to assist at an oath *More Judaico*, thus showing that unlike the fanatical orthodoxy he insisted on the political equality of the Jews. *Allg. Zeitung des Judentums*, 1869, p. 700.

† He is bitterly attacked by the leader of the ultra-orthodox party, Hillel Lichtenstein (1815-1891). See הלל תשובות בית הלל pp. 24-25, Szatmár, 1908.

seminaries. Alexander Kohut evidently had outgrown this view when he decided to enter the rabbinical Seminary of Breslau in 1861, for just at that time orthodoxy was engaged in a vehement warfare against the Institution, and its "Direktor" (president), Zechariah Frankel (1801–1875), charging him with destructive tendencies for his views on the authority of the Talmud\* in which Hungarian rabbis, among them Gottlieb Fischer, Kohut's predecessor in the rabbinate of Stuhlweissenburg, took prominent part.

The school of Breslau and its guiding spirit, Frankel, can best be characterized by its insistence on scholarship and its conservative policy on questions of the ritual, with freedom in theoretical research. In this atmosphere, whose influence is seen in the work of its earliest graduates, Joseph Perles (1835–1894), Moritz Rahmer (1837–1904), and Moritz Guedemann (1835–1918), whom Kohut met as mature young scholars, the young student imbibed the desire, which, according to his own testimony, he had already felt in the strictly Talmudic atmosphere of his home† to elucidate Jewish thought by studying the spiritual life of the environment in which the rabbinical literature originated. He threw himself with all

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\* See *Jew. Encycl.* article: Frankel: V, 483.

† Reines: Kohut's biography in *דור וחכמיו* Cracow, 1890, p. 96.

the ardor of youth into the search of collateral material in Arabic and especially in Persian sources. In the latter field he and his countryman, Wilhelm Bacher (1850–1914), are the only Jewish authorities.\*

According to his own report, Kohut first conceived the plan of an adequate Talmudic dictionary when, as a young man, he consulted the Aruch in Landau's edition, and found it insufficient. He must have soon learned, that as the Persian vocabulary penetrated into the Aramaic of the rabbinic literature, just as in other countries the languages spoken in the environment of the Jews left their traces in rabbinical literature, Persian customs, and especially folklore, were equally absorbed by the Jews, as they absorbed some of the folklore of their Latin, their Germanic and Slavic neighbors. The results of his studies are embodied in his thesis, which deals with the relation between the Parsee views of angels and demons and those found in Bible and Talmud.† A kindred subject is his essay on the analogy between

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\* The need of men of their type, and the loss sustained by Jewish scholarship through the premature death of Kohut is seen in the lamentably weak article on Persia in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, which suggests the great advantage which it would have meant for this work, had Kohut been spared for another decade.

† *Ueber die Juedische Angelologie und Daemonologie in ihrer Abhaengigkeit vom Parsismus. Leipsic, 1866.*

Parsee and rabbinic eschatology \* with its sequel on the parallels between the legends on Adam as found in rabbinic and in the Persian literature.†

It would be a presumption on the part of one who does not possess even an elementary knowledge of the language and the literature which Kohut so thoroughly mastered to express an opinion on the views at which his investigations arrive. It may be that he, like every specialist in a remote subject, was inclined to see appropriation in mere accidental analogies and to overestimate analogies in ideas which are the common property of all humanity. When we find that in Cremona in 1575 the German word “Kindbetterin” is used, it does not follow that the ruse of evading the ban against gambling under the pretext of entertaining the mother of the new-born, or other practices customary at childbirth in Italy, were borrowed from Germany.‡ Nor would it follow that the practice of commemorating the departed members of the family on the anniversary of the death, of which already the Talmud§ makes mention, is of German or of Christian origin

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\* *Was hat die Talmudische Eschatologie aus dem Parsismus aufgenommen?* Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft, Vol. XXI, 1867.

† *ib.* 1871.

‡ Lampronti: *פֶּתֶחַ יְצִתָּק*, article *חָרֵם*, p. 54 a.

§ *Nedarim*, 12 a.

because the word "Jahrzeit" is found in the vocabulary of the Italian Jews \* and has penetrated into Persia.† So it does not seem justified to accept Kohut's thesis of the Persian origin of the Book of Tobit ‡ against the views of Hitzig, Graetz and others, who place the book at the end of the first or at the beginning of the second century in Palestine.

The scientific freedom of the Breslau school, strangely contrasting with its submission to authority in questions of religious practice, finds its typical exponent in Kohut, who not only showed the influence of the fundamental dualistic doctrine of Parseeism in the second part of Isaiah, § which from the point of view of the orthodox in his native country was rank infidelity, but who went beyond the boundary lines, staked off by the earlier liberal exegetes like Luzzatto and even beyond what Frankel may have considered permissible, when he showed the analogies between Genesis and the sacred books of Persia.|| On

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\* In the form Orzai, *Vessillo Isr.* 1909, 170. See: Berliner: *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 179. F. a. M. 1913.

† Aminoff, לקומי דינים, Jerusalem, 1901. See: *Zeitschrift fuer Hebraeische Bibliographie*, V, 154 (1901).

‡ *Etwas ueber die Abfassungszeit des Buches Tobias.* Geiger's *Juedische Zeitschrift fuer Wissenschaft und Leben*, X, 49-73. 1872.

§ *Antiparsische Aussprueche in Deutero-Jesaiah.* Z. D. M. G., 1876.

|| *Zendavesta and the First Eleven Chapters of Genesis*, J. Q. R. II, 223-229, 1890.

the other hand, he followed the best traditions of his school in his fundamental work on the earliest translation of the Pentateuch into Persian, published by Jacob Ben Joseph Tawus in Constantinople, 1546, the first book of the Persian Jewish literature ever printed. By this book the young scholar, a few years out of college, achieved the greatest distinction which can fall to the lot of a student. He was a "pupil who instructs his teachers" \*, for his teacher Graetz, the greatest celebrity of the Breslau seminary, accepted in a later edition † the correction of his former statement, in accordance with Kohut's arguments. His main interest lay in the investigation of the Persian vocabulary for the benefit of Talmudic lexicography. To this subject he devoted an essay which appeared in the same year in which he entered the ministry as rabbi of Stuhlweissenburg. The essay, dealing with words of Persian origin in Talmud and Midrash, appeared in the periodical, edited by Hungary's most scholarly rabbi, Leopold Loew ‡ who, while born in Moravia, was an ardent advocate of Magyarization and therefore ceased the publication of his

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\* Talmud, Hagigah, 14 a.

† *Geschichte der Juden*, IX, 23, 3 ed.

‡ *Beitrag zur Erklarung der in Talmud und Midrasch Vorkommenden Persischen Woerter*. Ben Chananjah, 1867.



German periodical when Hungary had gained its autonomy. In the same year, he had occasion to preach a eulogy on the death of Solomon Loew Rapoport (1790–1867) whose essay on Nathan, the author of the first Talmud dictionary, helped to inspire him to do the great work of his life.

We see in these early works the idealism, typical of the students, who, no matter how remote from the interest of the masses their work was, always were actuated by the ardent desire to present Judaism in the proper light, so habitually misconceived and maligned by the non-Jewish world, and not least by scholarly orientalists. We see, as we shall again have occasion to notice, an almost childlike astonishment, mixed with genuine grief, that the Jewish lay-world does not appreciate the work which in the final resort is done on their behalf. In his introduction to the Pentateuch translation of Tawus, Kohut declares with the true idealism of the scholar that he does not look for any compensation for his indeed not easy labor bestowed on the work,\* and he hopes to have contributed his share to the refutation of the still prevailing contempt for Jewish contributions to the culture of humanity.† From this

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\* *Kritische Beleuchtung der Persischen Pentateuch-Uebersetzung des Jacob Ben Joseph Tawus*, p. XI, Leipsic, 1871.

† “Die banale und leider noch immer nicht ganz abgenuetzte Phrase wie ‘rabbinischer Aberwitz’ und rabbinische Fabeln.” *ib.*

point of view we understand and appreciate his statement that the expulsion of the Jews from Spain was a boon for the spiritual achievements of Judaism.\* We see how the devoted scholar is happy at any discovery which adds something, no matter now insignificant, to our knowledge of Jewish life and thought, when he edits with great care a contribution to Jewish liturgy by Saadya Gaon, the master mind of the tenth century and the pioneer of Jewish apologetics.† We see him equally devoted to the elucidation of a literature which for centuries had remained hidden in the dust of libraries and could at no time have exercised a deep influence on Jewish thought, when he painstakingly edited Arabic homilies of an almost unknown author of the fourteenth century.‡ Therefore he felt keenly the indifference to his work displayed by men whom he had a right to expect to give material support to the work which he so unselfishly bestowed on the elucidation of Israel's past. He is justly bitter against Adolph Sutro, who refused to allow him the use of some manuscripts in his library which he keeps under

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\* *ib.*, p. 15.

† *Die Hoschanot des Gaon, R. Saadia*. Reprinted from *Monatschrift fuer die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, vol. 37, p. 506-517, 1893.

‡ *Light of Shade and Lamp of Wisdom*. Hebrew-Arabic Homilies Composed by Nathaniel Ibn Yeshaya, 1327. New York, 1894.

lock and key\*, and he is sorely disappointed at the refusal of Baron de Hirsch to assist in the completion of the *Aruch*, altho the same man dispensed millions for the relief of the material distress of persecuted Jews. He is deeply hurt, not on account of the personal insult, but on account of the stolid attitude of the wealthy and socially prominent Jews to his life's ambition, when appealing on behalf of the *Aruch* to Sir Moses Montefiore, he is received by one of the great philanthropist's relatives, who told him bluntly: Sir Moses will not receive any schnorrers to-day.† Short as was his career in America, he appreciated the broader vision of American philanthropists, where the completion of his *Opus Magnum* was rendered possible by the generosity of Mr. Jacob H. Schiff and by the appreciation of his congregation. He sees in the land "of genuine freedom" the opportunity for the development of untrammelled research of Jewish literature as he saw in the expulsion from Spain a similar boon.‡ He remained to the end the true disciple of Frankel to whom rabbinical office was identical with genuine scholarship.

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\* *Notes on a . . . . Commentary to the Pentateuch Composed by Abou Manzur al-Dhamari . . .*, p. 11. New York, 1892; *Light of Shade*, etc., p. 13.     † In Reines, דור וחכמיו, p. 106.

‡ *Discussions on Isaiah, Ch. 53*. Reprinted from Reform Advocate, 1893.

With all his devotion to that part of Jewish literature which is only of interest to technical scholarship, Kohut possessed a deeply poetical soul which never was oblivious of the fundamental verity that all learning must in the end contribute to the betterment of humanity. One may see in him the romance of the Magyar nature which is apparent not merely in its poets like Maurus Jokai but also in its political writers. Kohut's language is almost dramatic when he preaches or delivers popular addresses, and occasionally even in the introductions to his scientific works. Yet he almost apologizes for "keeping his audience in the vestibule of Jewish learning instead of ushering them into the parlor," when he discusses rabbinical ethics\*, but he waxes enthusiastic when he presents Judaism as the religion which is able to harmonize realities with other worldliness, freedom of research with fidelity to tradition.† Again, with all his modern philological training and the prosaic exactness of the philologist, Kohut combines the old-fashioned love for the allegorical interpretation of Scripture and Midrashic literature, which, based on the Midrash, is

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\* *The Ethics of the Fathers*, New York, 1885.

† *The Hebrew Scriptures. What They Have Wrought for Mankind*, in : "*The World's Parliament of Religions*", p. 724-731. Chicago, 1893, also published separately. New York, 1893.

developed into keen dialecticism by the modern Hungarian school. In a memorial address on Rabbis Solomon Loew Rapoport of Prague and Wolf Aloys Meisel of Budapest who died within a few weeks of each other in 1867, he introduces his sermon with Amos, iii, 3, which he paraphrases: "can we see two such great men depart without convening to commemorate them"?\* In the same sermon, he applies to Rapoport's literary activity the words of Genesis, xlix, 12 in the interpretation: "while he still had his milk teeth, so to speak, his eye for the discovery of hidden truth was as strong as the red wine".† Similarly, he interprets the Talmudic passage: "He who holds a scroll of the Torah in his hands, while nude, shall be buried nude" ‡ in the sense that he who considers the Torah merely an object of study, strips it of its most beautiful garments.§ No thought could have more strikingly illustrated the blending of the scholar and the devout Jew in Kohut.

This romanticism, which might have been a credit to any Hungarian rabbi of the Presburg school, is also noticeable in Kohut's Hebrew style. A specimen in English translation would appear

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\* The real meaning is: "Will two walk together except they have agreed?"

† The real meaning of the text is: "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk," referring to the fertility of Judæa.

‡ Sabbath, 14a.

§ *Ethics of the Fathers*, p. 59.

ridiculous, but the scholar who follows the development of Hebrew writing from the seventh century on is familiar with the style which likes to express thoughts in allusions to well-known biblical and rabbinical passages.\* To the student of psychology this archaism is a natural symptom of the author's conservatism, of a romantic and enthusiastic love of old Judaism with all of its peculiarities, including its faults and foibles. It is the sentiment which so eminently characterises Zechariah Frankel, ingrained in him in the atmosphere of the ghetto of Prague in which he had grown up. One single instance in Kohut's writing will illustrate this point. In his lectures on the *Ethics of the Fathers* † he criticises the innovation of the American synagog which places men and women in the same pew. He declares that since Ezra's time men and women were separated in the synagog in order to guard against improper conduct. To the scholar whose critical mind did not submit to authority when he believed to

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\* See his Introduction to the *Aruch*, p. LXX,  
 תמכתי יתדותי על שלש עשרה מדות ויתרונות האלה ועל ידיהן  
 ההוצאה... ההוצאה מוכשרת להתיצב לפני מלכים מאן מלכי רבנן וברית  
 ברותה לשלש עשרה מדות וכו'

Similarly in the article Antoninus he says, referring to Rapoport's hypothesis, that Antoninus is identical with Marcus Aurelius לית נגר  
 ובר נגר.

† p. 26.



have found elements of Persian mythology in the Pentateuch, questions of synagog ritual were not decided by scientific investigation but by emotion based on Jewish tradition.

This love of ancient Judaism was the inspiration of his *magnum opus*, the Talmudic dictionary. There is perhaps no book in the world's literature which is less systematic in its arrangement than the Talmud. Indeed, it would be safer not to call it a book at all, but rather a compilation, consisting of a text with explanations, discussions of these explanations, extending over several centuries, and often interrupted by glosses and interpolations. The variety of time and of locality, with the change of the language used in the environment, made the text more and more obscure. Thus we find that rabbis who could not have lived so very long after the text of the Mishnah, on which they are commenting, was drafted, are discussing the meaning of a technical term, some declaring that they had inquired among all scholars without being able to obtain an explanation \* or frankly confessing that the explanation which they were giving was mere guess work.† The era of the Geonim extending over four centuries was mainly devoted to the elucidation of the Talmudic texts. Like all pro-

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\* Pesahim, 39a.

† Sanhedrin, 70a.

fessional scholars these men were jealous of their authority and insisted on the value of personal teaching. For this reason they would not have handy books of reference. Their explanation of difficult texts and terms were given in replies to questions addressed to them.\* It took again two centuries before one of these men conceived the plan of giving a dictionary explanation of difficult terms in the Talmud. This was Zemah bar Paltoi who flourished about the middle of the ninth century. Since his work has come down to us merely in quotations it is largely a matter of conjecture what kind of arrangement he followed. The fact that it was lost proves that it either never was popular or that it was superseded by the succeeding work of Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome in the eleventh century whose work has survived in Kohut's edition, and judging from the signs of the time, is going to survive centuries in this form.

The nature of Kohut's work is not easy to comprehend unless we trace the history of Talmudic philology. The work of Nathan ben Jehiel was indeed a master work of a pioneer which was for the first time presented with scientific appreciation by S. L. Rapoport in his biography of Nathan (1829). Kohut was able to correct this interpretation in many an im-

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\* Weiss: *Dor, Dor*, etc. IV. 15-16.

portant point. Abraham Zacuto, known to us now through the astronomic tables which Columbus had in his ship library on his first voyage to America, gave us also an unsystematic compilation of chronicle and source material for which, in spite of its awkward character, we have to be grateful in view of the dearth of historic sources. In this book \* he tells us that Nathan had gone from Rome to Babylonia to study in the famous schools of that country. Rapoport, though not accepting the statement absolutely, declares it quite possible. Kohut proves † that Nathan had used the explanatory notes of the Geonim, had embodied them verbatim in his work, so that the superficial reader might take Nathan as reporting personal observations in Babylonia when actually he merely quotes the words of one of the Babylonian teachers.

This, however, is but a small thing, though it is of considerable consequence to know where a scholar obtained the information which he gives to his readers. The full appreciation of Kohut's work which he began in November, 1878 ‡ and

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\* ספר יוחסין השלם, ed. Filipowski, London, 1857, p. 124.

† *Aruch*, Introduction, p. VI.

‡ He dates the preface in the old style, quoting a verse from the weekly Pentateuch lesson which expresses the idea which is uppermost in his mind. He chooses the words: "Out of this well they watered the flock" (Gen. 29, 2) which was read in 1878 on Dec. 1.

which he finished with the solemnity customary when a scribe finishes the writing of a Pentateuch, May 14, 1889, requires an outline of the history of the work. Kohut has done this work in his masterly introduction to the *Aruch* which gives the biography of the author, the sources which were at his command, the list of writers who used his work and of those who added to the development of Talmudic lexicography. Considering the thousands of works, dealing with the Talmud and its great variety of contents, the number of authors on its philology is small. The average student of Talmudic literature was satisfied when he understood the general meaning of a passage which he often could without knowing the meaning or the derivation of every word in that passage. Only exceptional men took an interest in the elucidation of every word in such a passage, and of these only a few possessed the philological equipment for such a work. There was Menahem di Lonzano (16th cent.), an Italian who lived the greater part of his life in Palestine and therefore had an opportunity of comparing Arabic etymology with the Talmudic lexicography. David Cohen di Lara, rabbi, and Benjamin Mussafia, physician, both living in the cultured community of Amsterdam in the 17th century, who possessing a thorough knowledge of the

Greek language, unknown to Nathan and to the Babylonian authors whose works he used as sources, added important explanations to the *Aruch*. Mussafia's work was especially valuable because, being added to a new edition of the *Aruch*, his in most instances correct explanations of Talmudic words from the Greek became easily accessible to the student, inasmuch as they were reprinted from the first edition (Amsterdam, 1655), in all subsequent editions.

It was not until the latter part of the eighteenth century, when the general inclination to secular studies influenced even some of the progressive Talmudists of the old type to pay greater attention to archeology and philology. Among them was the most prominent, Isaiah Pick (called also Isaiah Berlin) whose notes, dealing with archeological subjects, were again added to some of the subsequent editions. Kohut enumerates all his predecessors who made use of the *Aruch* or commented on it, beginning with the author's contemporary, the classic commentator of the Talmud, Rashi, (1040-1105) down to Joseph Steinhart (1707-1776), Isaiah Pick (1725-1799) and Maleachi Ha-Kohen Montefuscolo (c. 1700-1781). He carefully notes the quotations from the *Aruch* given by the older authorities but not found in our text, and without any desire of minimizing their

merits, he presents with unstinted appreciation the work done by his predecessors of the 19th century, S. L. Rapoport (1790–1867), Michael Sachs (1808–1864), Joseph Perles (1835–1894) and Jacob Levy (1819–1892), though the work of the latter was a competitor of his own, having, as far as non-Jewish scholars are concerned, the advantage of being written in German, and giving the translation of the passages quoted in German. On the other hand, Kohut's work, written in Hebrew, was of greater usefulness to Jewish scholars, and exceeded that of Levy in the fullness of quotations. Even in cases where Kohut cannot suppress severe strictures, as when he speaks of the *Aruch* edition by M. I. Landau (Prague, 1819–1824), the work of a well-meaning, but inadequately equipped publisher, he does it with the benevolent recognition of the author's good intention.\*

It is but just that in the appreciation of Kohut's work we shall give first his original contributions, which are a lasting monument to his industry and to his love of system, and as far as can be foreseen have put the finishing touch to the structure of Talmudic lexicography. Kohut's Introduction, giving the history of Nathan's work and of Talmudic philology down to his day, has

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\* Introduction to *Aruch*, LV–LVI.



been characterized. The greater marvel of erudition and of an industry which is nothing short of self-denial is the wonderful Index which gives a methodically arranged list of all Biblical and Talmudic and Midrashic quotations, found in the *Aruch*, of all quotations from older authorities, as Hay Gaon, Gershom of Mayence and Hananel of Kairouan (10th–11th cent.), even those that are not mentioned by the author as such, but silently embodied in his work, and a list of Italian words, composed by the author's son, George, for whose recovery from a severe illness he prays, adding that he had named him for his grand uncle Amram, a learned and ascetic rabbi, the pride of the family, the story of whose life was an inspiration of Kohut's youth.

The edition itself was so arranged that after a summary interpretation of the word the editor gives first the text of Nathan, followed by the notes of Mussafia, wherever they are found, though occasionally interspersing an explanatory remark of his own, and ending with his own additions, containing both dictionary explanations and additional references. In this way the reader obtains an insight into the historical development of Talmudic lexicography and an information, brought up to the latest discoveries. The complex nature of his task shall be illustrated by one

instance. The radix *ar* has eight different meanings: the Biblical meaning "pure" to which Kohut gives in addition to the definitions in the works of his predecessors, notes taken from the various Bible translations, as Septuagint, Onkelos, Jonathan, Tawus, Saadya and the Samaritan version. The second meaning "bell" is illustrated by Persian, Arabic and even Magyar etymologies with reference to an opinion found in the marginal note to a Rashi manuscript. The third meaning "pair" is taken from the Greek *ζυγόν*, as already Mussafia noticed, but the latter did not see that the fourth meaning "scissors" is derived from the same word. The fifth meaning "pace" Kohut explains from a textual corruption, the sixth "to incline" is derived from the Arabic, and the seventh "festival garment" from the Latin "sagum," and the eighth, given by Mussafia in a far-fetched etymology as "bath," Kohut proves to be based on a misinterpretation of the Targum to Esther, 1, 2,\* where really crystal is meant, derived from the first meaning of the term, in support of which he quotes an explanation by R. Gershom from a manuscript in the Vatican library.

This specimen should give to the uninitiated an idea of the remarkable industry, the devotion

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\* Kohut, *Aruch*, III, 270 b.

and the scholarship which was required to make the *Aruch Completum* possible. In addition one must not forget how difficult the financial side of the task weighed on a man subsisting on a modest salary and blessed with a large family, who had to be personally responsible for the cost of the publication, soliciting support, often, as was told before, exposed to humiliation, and only in the later years of his hard endeavor, obtaining substantial and generous assistance. One statement ought to be quoted as an illustration of his enthusiasm which may be called an almost childlike devoutness. He had carefully examined the seven editions and the seven manuscripts of Nathan's dictionary. The first edition quotes "*an Aruch.*" Kohut is happy to be able to prove that this quotation refers to the work of Zemah Gaon, and thus adds one more reference to the single one hitherto known in which Nathan quotes his predecessor. \*

The author of this sketch is compelled to confess his inability to pass judgment on Kohut's work as a lexicographer. It may be, as stated before, that Kohut overestimated the influence of Persian language and thought on Talmudic literature, though there can be no doubt that such existed. It hardly admits of any doubt that in the explana-

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\* במצאיה גרולה ה' חנני, etc., Introduction, p. XXI.

tion of individual passages, new finds and examination of old manuscripts will result in the correction of some of Kohut's statements. No human work is free from imperfections. It is a humorous coincidence that a typographical error in the *Aruch Completum* has, as it were, providentially indicated it. In the Appendix, containing corrections and additions (P. 21), in the phrase "blessed be he who remembers that which was forgotten" \* the word "forgotten" was forgotten. Yet if of any man's work, the phrase of Horace "*Exegi monumentum aere perennius*" may be used, Kohut's *Aruch* is entitled to this distinction. No less a man than Solomon Buber (1827-1906), the greatest modern authority on Midrash, said so when the first volume appeared, using a Biblical phrase: "such perfume has never come into the home of Hebrew literature." † One other thought arises in us when we consider the short career of but 52 years which was granted to this great scholar. It is expressed in a Talmudic legend. When R. Dosa, as a blind old man, was told that R. Eleazar ben Azariah was standing before him, he said: Our old friend Azariah has a son. Indeed this proves the Scriptural truth: "I was

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\* זוכר הנשכחות, a phrase taken from the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah.

† 1. Kings, x, 10; *Aruch*, p. LXXIII.

young and now I am old, but I have not seen the righteous forsaken.” \* Alexander Kohut’s memory is honored for the second time by a literary work, due to the filial affection of a son who, the father hoped, would become worthy of his ancestry, and as of the Patriarch Jacob, it may be said of him: He is not dead, for his progeny is living. †

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\* Psalm, xxxvii, 24. Yebamot, 16a.

† Ta’anit, 5 b.

AN ESTIMATE OF DR. ALEXANDER  
KOHUT'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY  
OF AMERICAN JUDAISM

BY MAURICE H. HARRIS.



WENTY-FIVE years ago there hailed from Hungary a Jewish scholar. He lingered with us here less than a decade, then was summoned to the "Academy on High." What lasting impression did he leave behind?

The perspective of a quarter of a century enables us to summarize his work as linguist, theologian, as teacher and communal worker. He had already won renown abroad as an Orientalist, a Chief Rabbi, a member of the Hungarian Parliament, a Superintendent of Schools, and as an eloquent orator. His supreme importance lies in the domain of scholarship, his *magnum opus*, a dictionary of the Talmud, consuming twenty-five years of his life. That aspect of his activity is considered in a separate study within this volume, and steps have been taken to perpetuate his valuable contributions to learning through the medium of a great American University.



This article is not a contribution for the student few, but for the less scholarly many. Let us briefly survey the religious influence exercised by Alexander Kohut and decide his place in American Israel.

## I

First, he was, in his day, the leading exponent of Conservative Judaism. Conservatism is a generic term to indicate the middle ground between the two great wings of Orthodoxy and Reform. Orthodoxy, broadly speaking, connotes that unchanged status in belief and practice which obtained in Israel since Karo's *Shulhan Aruch*, of the 16th century. This was a digest of Talmudic law and of later rabbinic *Responsa* up to that time, and which through the Printing Press then coming into use, was crystalized into a finality of Jewish obligation.

Reformed Judaism marks that new departure in the acceptance of Jewish Tradition as an evolutionary growth. It stands for a rationalistic interpretation of Scripture and of Revelation. It implies further a renunciation of the doctrines of National Restoration and of a personal Messiah. It claims the right of discrimination in Jewish ceremonial, both biblical and rabbinic, and finally is exemplified in a fuller sense of Israel's responsi-

bility for the spiritual welfare of the world at large.

How shall we define the place of Conservatism between these two main schools? We may say first that it accepts the old doctrines, but not quite in the old way. It grants a wider liberty in belief while urging conformity in practice; though even there it permits some modifications and abridgment in the elaborate ceremonial of the synagogue, evolved in the process of ages.

The Conservative Jew may continue to fulfill many customs, even though realizing that their purpose is outlived, purely out of sentimental association. Let us not call this illogical. Sentiment plays a large part in religion; does it not play a tremendous part in life? The Conservative and the Orthodox, then, may both observe the same rite, but from different points of view—the former may still fulfill, for example, the “second day” of the Festival, while not regarding the neglect as a transgression. He might hesitate to speak of the Sabbath as a literal command from Heaven, but none-the-less realize his obligation to fulfill it, to remain in touch with the whole house of Israel.

Finally, to make a complete statement of its case, many who call themselves radicals have their

conservative moments and their conservative moods. Doubtless, some such spirit inspired that Western rabbinic leader to restore the Torah and include an Ark in his otherwise radical fane.

## II

I have dwelt on this phase of our faith at length, because it largely defines the status of Dr. Alexander Kohut, and in order to make his position unmistakably clear. He presented his theological views in a series of addresses on the "Ethics of the Fathers." The application of ancient teaching to the issues of the hour is the old-fashioned but classic method of the homilist. Apart from the opinions there expressed, these addresses are marked by that scholarly erudition shown by rich drafts on Midrashic lore, mediæval philosophy and historic data, characteristic of all his literary efforts.

Utilising the chronicle of Jewish Tradition as contained in the opening chapter of the Ethics, Dr. Kohut boldly asserted that whoever turns away on principle from the standpoint of the validity of the Mosaic-Rabbinic Tradition, has banished himself from the Camp of Israel. Such are not Reformers, but deformers. Even the Karaites, who rejected Rabbinism and who consequently failed, more deserved the right to be

called Jews, for they, at least, regarded the Mosaic Law as divine.

This was really a challenge to the Reformed School. Dr. Kaufman Kohler, then of this City, took up the gauntlet thrown into the arena, and the theological tournament began. None better equipped than he to espouse the cause of Judaism's liberal wing; and his later call to fill the presidency of the Hebrew Union College justified him in coming forward as its exponent. His rejoinder was expressed in a series of addresses entitled "Backwards or Forwards." The discourses of both men combined to make an interesting contribution to the history of American Judaism.

Dr. Kohler criticised that endless list of ceremonial prohibitions, that made the Sabbath a burden and buried the spirit of Passover in voluminous data of fermentation. "Legality has blown out the light of religion," he declared. The woman in rabbinic Judaism was classed in some respects with the slave, and was not granted her full personal worth. Reform has changed the attitude of the Jew by telling him to rise from the ruins of the past and build a Temple to humanity, a Kingdom of Truth. "We must," further emphasized Dr. Kohler, "replace legality by intrinsic and spontaneous devotion;—lessening the binding authority of the past. The power of

regeneration is our privilege. Orthodoxy sees the word of God in petrified, unchangeable statutes." "All honor," said this reform teacher, "to those who conscientiously adhere to these ancient regulations, but they should not rule out of the fold those who can no longer accept them," nor style them, as Dr. Kohut has done, as merely "ethical Jews." Their reform views represent largely the status of the ancient prophets.

Dr. Kohler added that he was not blind to the fact that Reform had not made good all its promises and was not blind to the neglect of much that should be cherished, but the saving of Judaism cannot come through galvanizing dead forms into artificial life. We do not believe exactly as did our fathers on the doctrines of Revelation, the Law, Resurrection, or the Messiah. We do not believe that the sacrificial injunctions, the data of priestly garments and incense preparations, came from Heaven. We must recognize that certain Mosaic laws were protests against idolatries of their time, and to observe them now would be a mistaken loyalty. As Rabbinism supplanted Mosaism in the treatment of the heretic and in other regards, so Reform has superseded the Conservative school. Not backward, but forward lies the path of religious freedom.

Certainly Dr. Kohler made a splendid presentation of the liberal position.

### III

Dr. Kohut vigorously, yet courteously, took up the cudgels. Yet it may be said that this diatribe against Orthodoxy hardly applied to the Rabbi of the Ahawath Chesed Synagogue. He said the Jewish religion, as he conceived it, certainly stood for freedom, but freedom within limits. He staunchly stood by the ancient principle of the "hedge around the Law." Taking the Mosaic law as their starting point, the Rabbis adjusted it to the needs of the time. (Was this not a concession to the Liberal view?) "The whole issue," stated Dr. Kohut, "rests on the question: Is Judaism capable of development?" He answered, "Yes and No." "No," as concerned the Bible, the word of God. Dr. Kohut stoutly maintained that we must accept the Orthodox view of the doctrine of Revelation. Here we may say was the dividing line between these two eminent scholars. Dr. Kohut was conservative not only sentimentally but theologically. We note this direction in his presentation of the doctrines of Providence and of Retribution. I myself vividly recall a personal conversation with him, in which he said he was



firmly convinced in the coming of the personal Messiah.

In preaching on the quotation from the book of Judges "Each man did what was right in his own eyes," he pertinently asked the question, in furtherance of this controversy, "Wherein lies the right of the individual?" He cites an answer that famous Midrashic story (later quoted by Dr. Schechter in his *Aspects of Jewish Theology*), of one passenger in a boat defending his right to bore a hole through the ship at the place where he was sitting, on the plea that that was his seat. Certainly, he here placed his finger on one of reform's weaknesses—extreme individualism and the lack of central authority. Doubtless, he was directing his keen survey to the vagaries of some occupants of the American Jewish pulpit in his day, who may have lacked ripened scholarship. He was rightly jealous of the learning and dignity of the Jewish rabbinate. Perhaps he rather caricatured reform in his Talmudic disputation, "Which was right?" for we must regard his insistence on the validity of the Mosaic commands as an untenable position, though he tempered the claim by saying further, "as carried out by the new interpretation of the rabbis": Does not this loophole save the reformed position?

But it is hard to do justice to this great teacher

by singling out these isolated references. We must read the whole of his published addresses to realize the sterling faith that inspired his word. For he did not wholly defend the orthodox nor condemn the reformed position. He spoke, in fact, appreciatively of the abridged ritual of the American synagogue. At the same time, he uttered his warning voice against some American heresies, reminding us in the words of the rabbinic injunction to "Be as careful of small precepts as of great." "We dare not play with religion. We must be as scrupulous in the act of rejection as in the act of acceptance." Surely we reformers indorse him there. I imagine, too, he had in mind the splendid communal work of the liberal wing of American Israel in his interpretation of the text, "Combine the study of the law with good deeds," though lamenting that the tendency at the time was to neglect the former.

I think he reveals his innermost conviction when he presents before us that famous comparison of Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hyrkanos as "the well-cemented cistern" that does not lose a drop of water (nor add one), and Rabbi Eliezer ben Arach as "the bubbling spring." The former marks the classic orthodox position, the latter, with its vital principle of evolutionary development, the reform. In justice to Dr. Kohut, we must acknowledge

that, though he exemplified "the well-cemented cistern," there was something of "the bubbling spring" in his interpretation of our time and faith.

In noting his exposition of these ethical precepts on which he based his presentation of the conservative position, we can here well see how easily they lend themselves to the indorsement of the theories of the teacher expounding them. For example, in his famous address on the teaching of Rabbi Meir—not to look upon the vessel but upon its contents, since the new vessel may contain old wine and the old not even new—we can well see how a Kohler could make of that text as splendid a case for the reformed wing as Dr. Kohut did for the orthodox. He introduces, however, a new element in asking whether the vessel is sound, and if not, may not the precious wine leak from it? "If we shatter the vessel, what becomes of its contents?" Not that I honestly think that he wished to imply that such charge should be laid at the door of the advanced wing, but rather—such was his zeal for the faith—that he may have discerned a danger even in the harmless change. But there was a progressive spirit in his nature, too, for he said: be not like Honi-Hamagol, the Rip Van Winkle of the Midrash, who dreams while the world is moving.

Surely we are heart and soul with him when he comes forward with the ringing declaration of the uselessness of knowledge without character. This in illustration of the famous legend of the four scholars who entered the Garden of Eden, but only one came forth unscathed. Now, as much as then, do we plead with Israel to make their sacrifice for *Kiddush ha-Shem*, for the glorification of God, guarding our repute as His chosen witnesses. Let us, with him, point to Israel of the past, who, bearing all forms of humiliation, remained daringly loyal to the sacred cause.

Yes, when we come to the profounder issues, the orthodox and the reformed stand together and the Kohuts and Kohlers fight side by side for the spiritual legacy which, apart from their varied standpoints, they loved so well.

All will be in earnest agreement with his remarkable interpretation of that famous text, "It is time for the Lord to work; they are frustrating thy law," that a temporary suspension of a precept may be the best means of impressing its validity and arousing the community to a common danger. Also, a time may arrive to suspend a law to emphasize a higher religious need. In surveying his pulpit utterances I note that he does not overlook the eternal problem of the suffering righteous; that riddle of the universe that has perplexed

earnest souls ever since the days of Job. But through it all there shines his encouraging and unswerving faith.

#### IV

We will not be forming a correct estimate of the theological status of Dr. Alexander Kohut if, in spite of all that has been quoted, we class him as an opponent of reform. A critic, through the columns of the *American Hebrew*, in which these historic addresses appeared, reminded this teacher that the congregation whose rabbinate he had accepted stood for certain distinct reform beliefs and practices as expressed through the ritual drawn up by his illustrious predecessor, Dr. Adolph Huebsch. That liturgy eliminated belief in a personal Messiah, a national restoration, a bodily resurrection. This congregation, further, had females in its choir and the *Tallith* was not worn by its worshipers. But Dr. Kohut did not accept the religious status of the Ahawath Chesed Synagogue altogether without protest. He made a strenuous effort to restore a week-day service during the Hanukkah week and was not content merely to recognize Purim through the preceding Sabbath of Remembrance. He regarded it as a violation of Jewish observance to ride on Sabbath, and for that reason only, regretfully declined

to participate in the children's service at the Educational Alliance on Sabbath afternoon.

Yet, much included in the reformed status was unacceptable to him at first, largely because strange and unfamiliar. He soon learned to adjust himself to what we may call the American atmosphere. Nor were his strictures confined to one side. He did not hesitate to condemn certain errors of the orthodox school. He hastened to pay his tribute to that benevolence so characteristic of the liberal wing. But controversy was distasteful to his gentle disposition. This disciple of the peaceful school of Hillel rather pleaded for unity, reminding his hearers that the Israelitish nation fell, because of the lack of it, nigh two thousand years ago. Indeed, he made a resolute effort to form a union of all the congregations of this city. Alas, that is still an unattained desideratum!

We may infer that his condemnation was launched against some shallow, immature preachers who were rather heedless in their radical propaganda. So, in reviewing the famous controversy between these two renowned scholars, we might say that Kohut did not stand for the Judaism criticised by Kohler, nor did Kohler represent the kind of Judaism condemned by Kohut.



Unconsciously Dr. Kohut felt the influence of the environment of America. This does not mean that he approved of what came to be known as American Judaism. I do not know in how far he approved of his Synagogue being called "the Boehmische Schul." He objected rightly, I think, in applying a national cognomen to any phase of our universal faith. It seems strange, by the way, that the most bitter opponents of Jewish nationalism at the present hour are very stanch advocates of what they style "American Judaism." Of course, we cannot be blind to the fact that one's creed is influenced by the political atmosphere in which he lives. Doubtless the democracy and liberty of America have imperceptibly reacted on Synagogue customs, just as the royalties and social castes affected Jewish practice in European lands.

Undoubtedly, the change noted in Dr. Kohut's later addresses showed that he was getting his bearings and, in the best of senses, becoming an American. So it is significant that the first sermon delivered in the English tongue was an address on "Thanksgiving," an American institution. In the year 1887 he voiced his appreciation of the bounty of America's liberty and America's opportunity. When our famous Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor was dedicated,

the eloquent Dr. Kohut was selected as one of the speakers and chose as his theme "Liberty Enlightening the World."

V

The influence, then, of this man may be expressed as a wholesome check upon a too indiscriminate program of abolition characteristic of an early stage of American reform. A later synthetic stage has revived many poetic ceremonies of the Synagogue that it had earlier too hastily discarded. Doubtless, in the mutual criticism, one school of the other, each was able to take a lesson from its opponent. Here was an instance of one of the repetitions of history. We recall that the Rabbimates of the early Middle Ages found it necessary to study the Bible more diligently, and to cultivate Hebrew grammar, in order to meet their opponents, the Karaites, on their own grounds.

We may then say Alexander Kohut was the champion of conservatism, of which he was the best exponent. We are not forgetting either Szold or Jastrow; but these represented a stage further in advance, technically known as "moderate reform." He will be most lastingly remembered through two great movements that he was partly responsible in launching, though, strange to

say, neither was expressive of his own convictions. First, his addresses spurred on his opponents to convene the Pittsburg Conference with the radicalism of which he was entirely out of sympathy. This, secondly, reacted in the establishment of an Orthodox Jewish Seminary in New York, of which he was a joint founder with Sabato Morais, though he did not altogether indorse its theological status. Such are the ironies of life.

The Pittsburg Conference was one of a series of liberal Jewish assemblies that were first convened in Germany in the forties of the nineteenth century and were continued here later in America—America that took over the European reform tradition. The Pittsburg Platform may be regarded as reform's latest word.

The Theological Seminary of America was opened in January, 1887. Dr. Kohut felt, with many others, that whatever might be his individual convictions, it was for the welfare of Judaism at large that orthodoxy should have in America an efficient educational center. So he was among its early promoters and occupied its Talmudic chair until his death.

## VI

This is the year in which we of the progressive school have been celebrating the centenary of

Isaac M. Wise, the virtual father of American Reform. None the less, our survey of Judaism as a whole should be sufficiently comprehensive to realize the value of Kohut's contribution to the cause in making for a more positive Judaism. Let us not forget that Dr. Wise was a staunch pleader for the sanctity of Bible law, and that his views would be classed as conservative to-day. Dr. Kohut, then, prepared the way for that genius, Solomon Schechter, who "came and saw and conquered." But that is another story.

If he were alive to-day, he would see a different line of cleavage. There are two camps still, but no longer those of Orthodoxy and Reform, but of Zionism on the one hand and anti-Nationalism on the other. We are not as keen as were our fathers as to the discriminating points of distinction in synagogue observance—as to the covered head in worship, the recital of prayer in Hebrew—the retention of some Orientalisms. We realise that "life fulfils itself in many ways." The vital question is, Which school makes for the best kind of Jew? Something can be said for both wings. The motive behind the action is everything. There is all the ethical difference in the world between ceasing to observe dietary laws because they are regarded as part of an ancient taboo, no longer accepted, or dropping them

because they interfere with our indulgence. On vital issues, both wings of the synagogue voice the same principles. Both stand on common ground as to the need of the weekly Sabbath, the Sacred Days; of prayer and faith; both emphasize social justice and the domestic virtues as best expressive of the ethics of Judaism.

We want loyal Jews! We will not quarrel as to the theological complexion of their Judaism—the persistent enemy is indifference.

Would that he had lived longer to have seen the vast changes within Jewry and beyond it! He was taken from us all too soon. There was so much he might have achieved with his vast learning and his indomitable energy.

Verily, the memory of the righteous is a blessing, radiating a sweet influence through later generations long after he has passed away.

## SOME MEMORIES OF ALEXANDER KOHUT

BY MAX COHEN



IT is not easy to recall the minor details of occurrences and events that transpired thirty-five years ago. It is much easier to form a mental picture of so unique a personality as Dr. Kohut. I have certainly a very vivid recollection of the deep impression he made upon me when I first met him, and then gradually, as from week to week, he exerted an influence upon me, and we had an intimate intercourse that meant much to me, at the time, and left its vestige bright and fresh, throughout the years that have elapsed.

It was no slight task for a man to undertake to come here, a stranger from a strange land, to take the place of the well-beloved Dr. Huebsch, who for many years was the venerated Rabbi of the *Boehmische Schul*, and who, by his facile eloquence, keen intelligence, shrewd wit and kindly humor, had won for himself a high place in the community, as well as secured for him



a warm spot in the hearts of those who attended Temple Ahawath Chesed.

It did not require very much time to convince the community that in Dr. Kohut a new and striking character had been added to the Jewish spiritual forces of this country. It was not so much perhaps that he was a great Talmudic scholar, but that he had a happy faculty for utilising his wonderful mastery of Midrashic literature in giving his sermons and addresses that remarkable vividness and picturesqueness for which they were noted and that utterly defied the power of his translator.

That is the point at which I came into contact with him. From the very beginning I fell under the spell of his magnetic individuality. I was one of a group of young American Jews who, while not inordinately addicted to Orthodoxy as a rigid standardisation of thought and conduct, was yet opposed to the wholesale and reckless discarding of everything that was Jewish simply because it was inconvenient, oriental, or was not in conformity with Episcopalian customs.

To me, then, the coming of Dr. Kohut was the weaving of a banner for the renaissance of Historical Judaism. For, from the very outset, he caused it to be felt that he was shocked at the wild vagaries of Radical Reform.

And so, in my enthusiasm, I undertook the work of translating his sermons, from week to week, from the manuscript which he furnished. Of course, I did not, in my fervor, realise the difficulty of the task and the inadequacy of my mental equipment for the peculiarly delicate nature of what I sought to achieve. The hurried character of the work, rendered necessary by their weekly publication in *The American Hebrew*, which made proper revision impossible, was another factor in minimising its worthiness.

And yet, despite the shortcomings of the English version, the message he brought to American Israel had its effect. He certainly succeeded in laying down a consistent norm for conservative Judaism, based on a spiritual adhesion to those things that were vital and fundamental, and yet affording practical recognition of the need for meeting legitimately the mental and social attitude of the young men and women who were growing up in an American environment.

He was far from being of a combative or pugnacious character, and yet he soon became the center of a controversial orgy, the best expression of which, on the Radical side opposed to him, was found in the series of lectures delivered by Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, and later pub-

lished in pamphlet form, under the title "Backwards or Forwards?"

The wordy strife wound its devious course into all of the centers of Jewish life throughout the country, and had its culmination in the Rabbinical Conference which for three days grappled with the problem of formulating a platform for Reform Judaism. For three days the thirty-five representatives of Radicalism struggled and strove, discussed and disputed, with the result that a new *Confessio fidei* was presented to the world.

Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, of Chicago, who was a participant in its deliberations, suggested the elimination of the word "spread" from the platform, as people might think it a crazy-quilt. And the word spoken in jest proved to be prophecy.

The storm of protest and criticism that followed the publication of the Pittsburg Platform was one of the most violent in the history of Judaism in America.

Even the Reformers felt the impulse of indignation at the attempt to fasten upon them the odium of subscription to such doctrines as were embodied within its limits; to link them with an attempt to create sects within Israel, based upon the distinction between the moral laws and ceremonial laws, or upon the belief or unbelief

in the existence of the Jews as a nation, as distinguished from a religious body.

Those days are not so far in the past even though thirty-three years are the measure of time, but what the intelligent among our young people can appreciate the importance of the occasion when such men as Drs. Gustav Gottheil, Marcus Jastrow and Benjamin Szold repudiated the Conference and its work in unmeasured terms.

These men, and others like them, had been identified with Reform and connected with the leading Reform congregations in the country.

Indeed, Dr. Kohut, in the short time since his arrival, had certainly demonstrated that he was a dynamic force. Without any intention of letting loose any revolutionary energies, he had surely set in motion the thinking faculty of the Jewish people.

Of all the happy memories of the hours I spent with him in his study, in the top-floor front in the high-stoop house in East Fifty-seventh Street, there is nothing that is more firmly impressed upon me than his frequent expression of anxiety to avoid unseemly disputes with his rabbinical colleagues.

But, of course, when the controversy was forced upon him by his conscience, when there was involved a matter of principle, and par-

ticularly of religious principle, then there was no hesitation, and he entered lustily into the contest, but without any venom or vindictiveness.

Is it not wonderful to watch the growth from day to day of an humble plant as it first bursts its enshrouding clod of earth, gradually thrusts its head higher into the air, until finally it opens out the full fruition of what lay dormant in the seed?

How much more wonderful it is to follow the development of an idea, from the time when it is first uttered until it finally blossoms forth into the full flower of what was embedded in embryo, when the idea was given birth!

It was certainly a remarkable experience for me to be associated, in a very minor capacity, with the entire evolution of that thought of Dr. Kohut, sent forth to the world upon his arrival here, until it at last found fruitage in the creation of the Jewish Theological Seminary. It was certainly a precious privilege to watch the whole process, from beginning to end—although really the end is not yet.

Yes, the controversialists, on the conservative side, soon came to the realisation that a mere war of words would not dissipate or mitigate the baneful conditions of which the Pittsburg Platform was a symptom. The Conference that

created it was presided over by the President of the Hebrew Union College. That Institution was dominated by the influences which prevailed at the Conference.

Unless those influences were to be allowed to permeate the entire Jewish community in America, something effective must be done to counteract its power. Unless the Jewish pulpits of America were to be allowed to be filled by men whose hearts and minds had been fed on such provender, something effective must be set on foot to develop a corps of Jewish preachers and teachers, whose ambition should be animated by Jewish ideals and whose zeal should be dictated by Jewish thought.

These were some of the thoughts that gradually found expression and interchange of views among the leaders of those who adhered to the concept of Judaism as a continuing entity, all the way back from Abraham and Moses, through the prophets and sages, on to endless time, until the Messianic age shall dawn and gladden the lives of all men and all races and all nations and all creeds.

As these thoughts grew and spread, they converged towards one method of dealing effectively with the problem, and that was the creation of a Jewish seat of learning. This was the method that



appealed to Dr. Kohut and he espoused the cause with zeal and ardor. It enlisted the enthusiastic support of men like Drs. Sabato Morais, Jastrow, Szold, Bettelheim, Schneeberger, H. P. Mendes, and others, rabbis and laymen.

The project soon took shape. Conferences were had, and before long a convention was held, composed of delegates from congregations in various sections of the country. Naturally, the eyes of all turned to Sabato Morais as the head of the new Institution and to Joseph Blumenthal as the President of the Board of Trustees.

Dr. Kohut took up the work of enlisting popular support for the Seminary and of laying deep and firm the foundations of the establishment. This was work that enlisted all that was best in him. His scholarly instincts were all aroused at this call for the creation of an Institution of Hebrew learning, where Judaism should be honored and its traditions preserved and perpetuated.

Just as my editorial position on *The American Hebrew* was the means of my being closely associated with him from the time of his arrival in this country, so my position on the Board of Trustees of the Seminary afforded me exceptional opportunity to observe his activity in connection with that institution.

His was the influence that made for thorough-

ness. He had but scant patience with superficiality. While, of course, he recognised that the very creation of the Seminary was based upon the hope of training rabbis, who should be loyal and faithful to the teachings of Judaism, he was equally insistent that they must be endowed with a comprehensive knowledge that should command respect.

On Sunday, January 2, 1887, the Jewish Theological Seminary was opened;—about a year and a half after Dr. Kohut's arrival in America. That is no mere casual coincidence. There can be no more certain demonstration of cause and effect than these two incidents. Surely, there were numbers of able and influential colleagues who were with him in the work, but the outstanding fact remains true that his initiative it was that finally resulted in the establishment of the Seminary.

What really appealed most to him was the work upon which he was engaged in his study; the stupendous researches in connection with the *Aruch Completum*; and the reading that he conducted to keep himself abreast with the scholarship of his time. His favorite occupation was followed at the long, high table at which he stood, in the great room, with walls and shelves and floor and tables filled to overflowing with books.

But with all his devotion to his study, and his zeal in behalf of his congregation, and his kindly, loving, gracious relation with his family, he found ample time to apply to the foundation and conduct of the Seminary, with whose development his heart was bound up and for whose welfare and that of its students he was ever solicitous.

The minutest details attracted his attention and concerned him seriously. The arrangement of studies; the admission of pupils and their assignment to grades; the provision for secular studies; the selection of instructors and discussing with them the subjects and methods to be pursued; all these things, and many more of a kindred nature, aroused in him the warmest interest and secured from him the most earnest consideration.

Yes, he certainly had a mission to Israel in America, and he fulfilled it wisely and well.

Of interest, too, among my recollections of him, is the pleasure he manifested when his congregation yielded to his persuasion and reinstated the observance of the historic Feast of the Maccabees, the symbol of our national life, the very first *Hanukkah* after his coming. And so, too, with the same course of the congregation, in the ensuing springtime, in restoring the celebration of *Purim*, the other peculiarly nationalistic festival.

The latter event is associated in my mind with the grief with which it was connected for him, by reason of the death of his dear wife, two weeks before. It was indeed a sore affliction, by reason of the devotion with which she had taken from his shoulders all the cares of the household and the training of the large family of children.

From the very beginning, he was in constant demand to deliver lectures. It was impossible for him to accede to all the requests that were made to him. Among some of the best-remembered of these are the Biblical origin of legends concerning Zoroaster and the Genius of the Talmud, both before Young Men's Hebrew Associations.

He was very much interested in the Young Men's Association of the Congregation Ahawath Chesed, and did everything he could to secure for it a series of the best lectures and in other ways to enhance the attractiveness of its sessions. It was before this Association, I believe, that he delivered his first public address in English.

As my memory reverts back to those early years, I recall particularly how voracious he was for facts in regard to all of the men and conditions in Israel here. He would politely and with interest listen to any casual comments I might make. But what he was after were the basic facts, and then he would form his own judgment.

He had no time for gossip, no patience for petty disputes. First of all he was a Jew, anxious to prevent the development of sectarianism in Israel. The multiplication of individualistic prayer-books for use in the separate Reform temples was a source of great annoyance to him. His mind was fixed upon the hope and dream of a *Congregation of Israel*.

Equally distasteful to him was the term "American Judaism." This sense of separation of our people in this country from the whole body of Israel was utterly repulsive to him. His vision was extensive enough to see the whole long line of continuous national devotion of Israel to its historic purpose and sufficiently intensive to inspire him with the hope of doing his share towards maintaining that historic continuity and that unity of effort.

To him, Conservatism was something more than the mere preservation of the whole body of Jewish culture. It involved its enrichment with all that was wisest and best, with all that was true, in the thought and research and inspiration of the scholars, seers and dreamers of the entire world.

It has not been my purpose here to furnish a biography of Dr. Kohut or a study of his work as scholar or rabbi. It is nothing more than an

attempt to set down some of the recollections of my personal contact with him in connection with events of profound concern to Judaism.

I cannot forbear, however, from adding a few of my impressions of his personality in addition to what I have already incidentally suggested. He was rather serious and sober-minded, as a general thing, and yet he had a goodly sense of humor, on occasion, and could relax, at times, and indulge in playful witticism. While he could become righteously indignant at what he considered wrong doing or wrong thinking, I never knew him to lose his temper or mental equipoise. Superficiality would probably excite his ire more than anything else.

He was far from being a social lion. All found him an agreeable companion. He could ingratiate himself with the young, and the old deemed it a privilege to be held in converse with him. Without ever descending to the commonplace or the flippant, he could meet every one on themes of interest to those with whom he held intercourse.

But, after all, of what avail is all my zeal to add a line here and a stroke there to what must, in the end, be but an incomplete portrait. The few years of Dr. Kohut's life that I have partially described are, of course, but a fragment. They



constitute, however, a fragment that even by itself enables us to form a vivid conception of the man; a scholar and a thinker, strongly imbued with love for his ancestral faith and intensely filled with the national spirit that realizes how indissolubly united are the ideas of people and religion for the fulfilment of the mission of Israel.

There have been few scholars in America in the field of Jewish learning as great and versatile as he; there have been but few who have had so lofty and consistent a conception of the spirit of Judaism and its obligations to humanity, and fewer still of those who made such a deep or such an enduring impress upon the life and thought of our people, as did Alexander Kohut.

# I

## THE ETHICS OF THE FATHERS



AS GOD pursued His work of creation, He assigned to everything its distinctive function. To the trees, for instance, He prescribed that they bear seeds within themselves, "yielding fruit whose seed is in itself." The same is true of all things in Nature, whose forces are renewed by power innate in themselves.

Metaphorically the Torah is called a tree. "It is a tree of life to those who lay hold of it." On that Jewish tree of life have blossomed lovely fruits that have served at all times, in moments of grief as in hours of joy, to give the needed word of warning or to warm the heart of Israel. Under the shade of this tree of life, Israel rested in the storm and stress of persecution and in the withering heat of hatred, that has been his lot almost without surcease. This tree he nurtured with the heart's blood of three thousand years of martyrdom.

Would you become acquainted with the most

beautiful fruitage of this tree? God willing and your patience granted, we will wander together in the garden to pluck the fruits. I shall not weary of penetrating the depths of Jewish ethics to gather pearls of wisdom for you—moral truths, which may be to you, so to speak, a *vade mecum* for use in the exigencies of the world and of life.

In a word, I propose to deliver a cycle of religious discourses, each complete in itself but inter-related with each other, on the Ethics of the Fathers. And I am doing so, impelled by the beautiful old custom of delivering discourses on this theme during the summer Sabbaths. These ethical sayings of the Fathers, inspiring and exalting, embody the highest wisdom of life. They contain within them the seed of truth. They are the fragrant fruit ripened on the Jewish tree of life.

We may consider the first sentence of the Ethics as introductory:

משה קבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע ויהושע לזקנים וזקנים  
לנביאים ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה : הם אמרו  
שלושה דברים הוו מתונים בדין והעמידו תלמידים הרבה  
ועשו סיג לתורה :

“Moses received the Torah on Sinai and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the Elders; the

Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the Men of the Great Synagogue."

I reserve for future consideration a historical and literary review of this Great Synagogue. Suffice it for the present to remark that these "Men of the Great Synagogue" were the representatives of the newly-developed Judaism at the time when a portion of the Babylonian Jews returned from their exile to the Holy Land, where they established themselves anew and determined upon matters of highest import to Judaism for all time; laying, so to speak, a new foundation upon which Judaism might again flourish.

The chain of tradition continued unbroken from Moses through Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets and the Men of the Great Synagogue, down to the latest times. On this tradition rests our faith, which Moses first received from God on Sinai. On this foundation rests Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism to-day; and on this foundation we take our stand. He who denies this, denies this on principle, disclaims his connection with the bond of community that unites the house of Israel.

Let it be well observed, I say *denies this on principle*; because there are many who do not observe this or that ordinance of Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism, who cannot or will not apply

it to the exigencies of life, yet who admit that these laws are applicable to the conditions of modern existence. Even the most pious Jew cannot observe all of the 613 laws, with their infinite ramifications and applications. Many laws, mandatory and prohibitory, lapse by their very nature or by the decree of God under certain designated contingencies. Such are the so-called חובות ארעה—the laws whose validity is limited to the confines of Palestine, the laws pertaining to the sacrifices, to tithes and to the first-born. Even of the חובות גברא—the personal laws, of universal application and perpetual validity, not every one can be observed to-day.

In this connection I would comfort those whose hearts are grieved at the thought that they cannot fulfil the whole of the Law. I would give them a noble-minded explanation of the great Maimonides, which I offer with less reluctance, because it explains beautifully the sentence which invariably closes each section of the Ethics of the Fathers:

רצה הקב"ה לזכות את־ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, seeking to make Israel worthy, gave him a Torah and many commandments for his observance.”

Maimonides illustrates this verse by a story

from the Talmud,<sup>1</sup> where it is related how, during the persecution of the Jews by the Emperor Hadrian, when death threatened those who faithfully observed the Law, R. Hananiah ben Teradion was discovered in the act of teaching his disciples and sentenced to die by fire. Before his execution, R. Hananiah was oppressed with gloom.

"I am inconsolable," he said to his friend R. Jose ben Kisme, "not because my earthly existence is about to be brought to an end, but because I may be deprived of my share in the life to come."

"Tell me," said his friend reassuringly, "have you ever fulfilled a single religious obligation from a pure and unselfish motive?"

"Indeed," answered R. Hananiah. "I have gathered moneys for the poor and the funds of widows and orphans were entrusted to my care. It happened once that my own not-insignificant funds were inextricably mixed with the money for the poor, without any chance of knowing the amount of either. To ensure the widows and orphans against every danger of loss, I applied the entire fund, including my own money, to the use of the poor."

"If you acted thus with conscientious unselfishness," said R. Jose, "and observed God's law without interested motive, you may be sure of your portion in the future life."



From this Talmudic tale Maimonides demonstrates that he is a true Jew, assured of the future life, who observes a single command from a pure, unselfish motive. The same is meant by R. Hananiah ben 'Akashyah when he said that "God, seeking to make Israel worthy, gave him many laws," so that out of the many, some could be chosen for observance by every one; not that one should have the preference over another, but that at least one law should be observed in a pure spirit.

This digression suggests to us that not everyone should be condemned who cannot observe all the laws with equal fidelity—taking for granted, however, that he acknowledges the binding character of the Law. Only he who denies this, who rejects on principle the validity of the Mosaic-rabbinical tradition, thereby banishes himself from the camp of Israel, writes his own epitaph: "I am no Jew, no adherent to the faith of my fathers." He denies that Moses received the Torah on Sinai and handed it down to Joshua, he to the Elders, these to the Prophets, they to the Men of the Great Synagogue; and so on to the Soferim, the teachers of the Mishnah and the writers of the Talmud. He who breaks down the truth of tradition ceases to be a Jew—he is a Karaite.

This Jewish sect, which arose in the ninth

century, recognised only the validity of the Written Law and rejected the Oral Law. What did it accomplish? Nothing. It decayed and disappeared. We cannot maintain Judaism without tradition. Without the oral teaching we cannot comprehend the written, out of which it is developed. This oral teaching served to guide the infant steps of Judaism, and when Israel grew to man's estate, it proved a safe path on which his religion historically unfolded. This path we do not wish, nay, we never shall leave.

A Reform which seeks to progress without the Mosaic-rabbinical tradition is a deformity—a skeleton without flesh and sinew, without spirit and heart. It is suicide; and suicide is not reform. We desire a Judaism full of life. We desire to worship the living God in forms full of life and beauty; Jewish, yet breathing the modern spirit. Only a Judaism true to itself and its past, yet receptive of the ideas of the present, accepting the good and the beautiful from whatever source it may come, can command respect and recognition.

But let us guard carefully against heresy-hunting. It is worthy of note that the first moral truth enunciated in the Ethics is this: "Be circumspect in judgment." We believe that we represent true Judaism. Let us not excommunicate the leaders and members of other congrega-

tions who maintain a different standard. While we may deplore the fact that each swings his censer of separate religious views, let us realise that everyone must strive after truth in his own manner. Let us learn tolerance from the Rabbis of old, so often and so unjustly decried as intolerant, who said: "Israel is to be likened unto the pomegranate; even the seemingly insignificant among him is full of virtue and humanity, as the pomegranate is full of seed." <sup>2</sup>

How much that is good and humane is practised by the Reformers. Our *false* Orthodox—(sincere and honest Orthodoxy is tolerant)—who are so ready to use harsh words and who would deny the Jewish name to everyone who differs from them in opinion, should judge with greater leniency the Jewish heart that dispenses charity. Where the Jewish heart still beats, Judaism and Jewish piety are not extinct. Therefore, "Be circumspect in judgment."

On the other hand, we call to those of more liberal tendencies, in the words of the same ethical maxim: העמידו תלמידים הרבה "Raise up many disciples" ועשו סוג לתורה "and make a fence around the Torah." How glorious would be the outlook of American Judaism if these two precepts were fulfilled!

I know but little as yet of the Jewish statistics

of this great country. I do not know whether New York has 90,000 or 100,000, or 120,000 Jews. Be their number what it may, I say: "May the Almighty multiply and bless them!" But I am sure that they are not all members of Jewish congregations. I would be satisfied with a third or a fourth part. This is an anomaly that should not continue.

I do not know whether it will be my good fortune to have your sympathy in my religious attitude—that of Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism, freshened with the spirit of progress, a Judaism of the healthy golden mean. I hope I shall. For such a Judaism I plead. Unfurl, then, your banner of REASON-ABLE PROGRESS. You must. I know you will.

## II

### THE FENCE AROUND THE LAW



IN my first discourse, I tried to demonstrate that the very existence of Judaism depended upon the belief or non-belief in tradition that dates from the time of Moses. I have striven to prove that Judaism stands or falls according as it is or is not based upon a Mosaic-rabbinical foundation. Let us now see how the development of this tradition is to be understood.

Is Judaism a finished product for all time or is there still a need for further development? If Judaism is to-day a closed book, then we dare not depart even a hair's breadth from the limited intellectual sphere of our ancestors. We would not dare "remove the ancient landmark." This standpoint is one of petrification. We should be like that R. Eliezer of whom the Ethics tells—"A cemented cistern which loses not a drop." Like him, we would only transmit that which has been taught us by our teachers. We would be doomed to spiritual stagnation and to mechanical

thoughtlessness. We might then, indeed, be justified in asking: "Are we still Jews?"

For even the most orthodox cannot affirm that he confines himself strictly to the intellectual attitude of the ancients. For, were he to do so, a smile would never play upon his lips, for the Talmud enjoins the most solemn earnestness at all times.<sup>3</sup> The unlearned would not eat meat<sup>4</sup> and we would not even drink water, much less wine, because, forsooth, libations of wine and water were made on the altar at Jerusalem, and with the cessation of these libations, the pious are forbidden the use of wine and water!<sup>5</sup> Whither would this blind letter-worship lead us? No longer could we lay claim to be "a wise and an understanding people"; we should be a foolish and a stupid people, indeed.

Looking at the reverse side of the picture, Reform claims to cleave to the spirit, removing all non-essentials. Whither does *this* conception lead us? Simply to the position of the Alexandrian Philo two thousand years ago. That neo-Platonic Jewish philosopher, in accord with the symbolizing spirit of his time, laid down the principle that the Biblical truths, historical as well as ethical, were merely abstract ideas. The Day of Atonement, e.g., or the Sabbath, is only the idea of the supremacy of mind over matter; Passover is the idea of



abstinence; the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, too, are ideas—Abraham representing mind, Isaac, suffering, and Jacob, labor. According to this method of interpretation, the Biblical law evaporates into mere ideas. Before all this spirit, the body disappears. But a bodyless spirit is as little comprehensible as a spiritless body is vital and potential. This purely spiritual conception leads us as far from pure Judaism as the mechanical, unthinking method.

Whether Judaism is evaporated or reduced to a dead level; whether it is so refined that nothing remains but a shadow of empty phrases; or whether it is taught with such coarseness as, e.g., in the *שיעור קומה* as to be almost blasphemous;<sup>6</sup> in all these cases Judaism is not rightly understood. Were Moses ben Amram and Moses ben Maimon,<sup>7</sup> greatest sons of Israel in whose laps Judaism was nurtured, to rise from their graves and contemplate our modern Judaism, they would neither recognise the narrowness of the Orthodox nor the Mosaism of the Reformers as being of the essence of the religion which they had taught. They would say: "You who seek only the spirit, lose thereby the kernel of religion, because the kernel needs the protecting shell; while you, who take only the husk, the shell, can for that very reason never penetrate to the kernel."

How, then, shall we find the pure and true Judaism? Only by the happy reconciliation of both aspects. The Men of the Great Synagogue discovered the correct method: "Make a fence around the Torah."

He who possesses a beautiful garden makes a fence around it so that neither man nor beast can trespass therein and work destruction. So, too, must the garden of the Torah, enriched with noble trees and lovely plants, be enclosed by a protecting fence. Would you know the name of this protecting fence? It is called REVERENCE, that keeps us from touching and handling without respect, with clumsy, unskilful hands the flowery domain of the divine Law. Reverence alone can preserve the plants which have been entrusted to our keeping. "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the ground whereon thou standest is holy ground." Shake off the dust which clings to your feet when you tread the holy ground of religion. Would you approach the pure glory of divine ideas with the earthly dust of your daily life? You, with your limited mental faculties, would seek to discover the final cause of the divine Law and would even model it after designs of your own convenience! Do you not know that "religion," by its very etymology, is "the consciousness of being bound?"

"The slave loves license and would break the chains which bind him," says the Talmud.<sup>7</sup> License is not liberty. Religion, which also would make man free, free from the enslaving senses, stands for freedom within bonds. With religion, you are, though in fetters, free; without it, you are, though unbound, fettered. Buried within your soul, the law of God makes you free. Blot out this divine inscription and the heavenly token of the divinity of your new birth will flee from you, you will remain what you were at your birth, a wild, untameable animal, dangerous to yourself and to all about you.

But you may ask: Shall the fence around the garden, shall reverence be extended around everything that the past hedged in? Are there not, perhaps, too many fences already? Have not our over-pious ones drawn around the fence so many other fences that access to the garden of religion has been well-nigh cut off? Shall we strike the same key as those Halachic pilpulists with their "four ells of the Halacha," who held as their highest principle, כל המחמיר תבא עליו ברכה— "Whoever can conceive of even one new difficulty, upon him shall fall the blessing." Shall we never dare to say with the Talmud: כח דקתירא עריה— "The spirit of explanation, which lightens the burdens, is to be preferred"? <sup>8</sup>

To all this, my answer is: "Make a fence around the Torah." Not everything devised by one who in his leisure hours seeks to win for himself the name of a מחמיר, a scholar who creates difficulties, not everything that is published as *Torath Mosheh* is necessarily the teaching of Moses. Nor is everything *Torath Mosheh*, which strives to relieve from all burdens. We regard the Torah as that which is commanded in the teachings of Moses, looking, however, to its spirit and its significance for the culture of mankind. "Remember the days of old," said Moses, "*and have regard to the changes of each generation.*" (Deut. xxxii, 7.)<sup>9</sup> The teaching of the ancients we must make our starting-point, but we must not lose sight of what is needed in every generation.

Moses, inspired though he was, would never have confined us to the narrow sphere of long-past centuries. He wished only to start us aright in "the days of old." "Bind yourselves closely," he seems to say to us, "to the past, to the Law received on Sinai." He knew well enough that every generation would have its own dominant ideas, its own ideals. Therefore he permitted you, believers in Mosaism, provided that you have chosen the proper starting-point, to pursue your own goal to perfection. That is what the Talmud

means, when it says: *אין לו לדיין אלא מה שעניו רואות*—“The judge can only decide from his own point of view.”<sup>10</sup>

This was the method of the Soferim, the Tannaim, the Talmudists and the Codifiers. They all took as their starting-point the divine words of the Jewish writings, which they fenced in with their *גזרות ותקנות*—their regulations and ordinances—always, however, with the fullest regard for the exigencies of the times and for the changes that might become necessary in consequence thereof.

And as these elders did, so can—yes, so must we, the later Epigoni, do in the exigencies of our own day. If the power to make changes was granted to the Elders, is not that power given equally to us? “But they were giants,” we are told, “and we, compared with them, are mere pigmies.”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps so; let us not forget however, that a pigmy on a giant’s shoulder can see further than the giant himself.

Let us now revert to the question raised at the outset: Is Judaism definitely closed for all time, or is it capable of and in need of continuous development? I answer both Yes and No. I answer Yes, *because Religion has been given to man*; and as it is the duty of man to grow in perfection as long as he lives, he must modify the

forms which yield him religious satisfaction, in accordance with the spirit of the times. I answer No, in so far as it concerns the Word of God, which cannot be imperfect. תורת ה' תמימה—“The Law of the Lord is perfect.” (Ps. xix, 8.) You Israelite, imperfect as you are, strive to perfect yourself in the image of your perfect God. Hold in honor His unchangeable Law and let it be your earnest task to put new life into the outward form of our religion.

Let me illustrate what I mean by a concrete example. Since the time of Ezra, our women have been separated from the men in our houses of worship. Why? In order that the proprieties of the synagogue should not be disturbed through unbecoming conduct. But where reverence, piety and religious fervor are found in men and women, shall I strive against it? Our women, indeed, are far more pious than our men. I believe that if I could win over our women to attend the Friday night service in the temple, I am sure that the men would soon follow, and ומתוך שלא לשמה—*from coming to seek their wives*, they would remain to seek their God. Here you have a modern interpretation of the words עשו סוג לתורה—“Make a fence around the Torah,” for the sanctification of the Sabbath.

Let me give you another practical illustration.



After our wives, who are dearest to us? Our children. We have well - organised religious schools with staffs of trained teachers. If parents had attended, as they should, the examinations which have been going on for several weeks past, they would have discovered, with regret, that the children can read our beautiful Jewish prayers only with the greatest difficulty. This is due to the fact that the home does not assist the school as it should. Parents, teach your children the Hebrew prayers in your homes and set them the example by praying yourselves. Children learn best from parental example. Then you will know by experience what is meant by the maxim, עשו סין לתורה—"Make a fence around the Torah." Your children will learn to love the Jewish writings and awaken your memories. And in time, you may once again have the Jewish home life and learn to love Mosaic-rabbinical Judaism.

### III

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF JUDAISM



FROM the day of Revelation, the day destined for the salvation and happiness of humanity, is dated the national existence of Israel. Before that day, the children of Abraham were simply members of a large family, a slave herd without self-consciousness or intimation of the higher Power that rules the destinies of mankind. In Egypt, they were a mere body of men without purpose, spending their energies in the treadmill of forced labor, without ambition or yearning for loftier things, moved only by the rod of the tyrant. Only at the foot of Sinai did they become conscious of themselves and make themselves of significant worth to humanity. With the lightning-flash of Sinai, they felt that they were to be no longer mere purposeless tools, but messengers of a great mission of religious and ethical ideas.

The first, spiritually-illuminating *אנכי*, "I am the Lord, your God," gave them this sense of self-consciousness. Again was uttered the crea-

tive word and light was in their minds, which had so long been encompassed by spiritual darkness. Light was in their hearts, which had been so long insensible to the religious feelings which bring happiness in their train.

בשברא הקב"ה את עולמו אמר, השמים שמים לה' והארץ  
נתן לבני אדם, וכשבקש ליתן תורה לעמו ישראל אמר,  
מכאן ואילך ילכו התחתונים אל העליונים וירדו העליונים  
לתחתונים :

"When God created the world," say the Sages, "it was decreed that heaven was God's heaven, and that the earth belonged to the children of men. But when the Torah was given to Israel, it was ordained that thenceforth those who are below should lift themselves on high, and that those above should descend to earth."<sup>12</sup>

How penetrating and yet how elevating is this saying of the ancients! Before Revelation, they used to say that only the earth belonged to the children of men; they clung to the clod, moving only in the sphere of their senses and worshipping Nature. They could not rise to the height of the idea of God. At Sinai, heaven opened itself to man, and from out of the heights the All-merciful stretched out his hand to the child of dust and lifted him to a moral atmosphere. No longer was man orphaned, for his soul could now find its way to the knowledge of the Only One. He had

discovered that there was a moral force, a higher Power in the universe, which alone could say אֲנִי : "I AM." Man had found God, and with the discovery, an end was begun of the errors and confusions of weak, vacillating humanity, and stability was assured. Thus were verified the Biblical words (Ps. lxxv, 4): נְמוּגִים אֶרֶץ וְכָל יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ : — "Whereas aforetime the earth swayed and its inhabitants were unsettled, the אֲנִי which resounded through the world and sank as a higher moral force into the hearts of men, cemented the foundations of the earth and assured stability to its pillars."

And what are the pillars upon which, since the day of Revelation, the Jewish world has rested? One of the Sages has given us the answer:

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל  
גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים :

"The ethical world of Judaism rests upon three things: upon the Torah, upon Divine Worship and upon the Practice of Charity."

Let us now examine these three foundations of Judaism in the light of the Ten Words.

הַתְּנָה הַקֶּבֶ"ה עִם מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית וְאָמַר לָהֶם, אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מִקְבְּלִין הַתּוֹרָה אַתֶּם מִתְקִימִין, וְאִם לֹא, אֲנִי מַחְזִיר אֶתְכֶם  
לְתֵהוּ וּבֵהוּ :

"God created the heaven and the earth only

conditionally. The condition was the acceptance by Israel of the Torah. Should Israel decline to receive it, earth and heaven must return to their original *תהו ובהו*." <sup>13</sup>

It is an inspiring thought that lies hidden in this sentence. The first divine creative thought and the final cause of creation was moral perfection, the impulse towards which is implanted deep in every human being. The recognition and the realisation of our filial relation to God is the patent of nobility inscribed upon the brow of man created in the image of God, an inscription which should never be obliterated by man unless he wishes to sink again into a condition of spiritual *תהו ובהו* and be relegated to moral chaos and anarchy.

This moral anarchy, characteristic of the pre-Sinaitic period, has been beautifully illustrated by the Sages. <sup>14</sup>

"Before offering the Torah to Israel, God offered it to other peoples.

"What is written therein"? asked the children of Ishmael?

"Thou shalt not steal. The property of strangers must be sacred to you."

"We cannot accept the Torah, for we, wild sons of the desert, live by depredation."

Then God offered the Torah to the children of Ammon, who led dissolute lives.

"What is written therein"? asked the children of Ammon.

"Thou shalt not commit unchastity. Marriage must be sacred to you."

"We cannot accept the Torah. From unchastity do we spring and we will not be restrained."

And so God offered the Torah to all the nations of the earth in turn and each in turn refused it."

When the Torah was offered to Israel, he did not hesitate for an instant, and as with one voice, he exclaimed: "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do and understand." (Ex. xxiv, 7.) Ordinarily we listen first and then, after investigation, we accept and obey. Israel, however, promised to obey the Law of God unconditionally and afterwards to study its precepts: נעשה—and then נשמע. Thus did Israel save mankind; and because of his compliance, he was rendered capable of comprehending God's word. And because Israel was the only people that manifested such comprehension, he was addressed with the words אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ: "I am the Lord, *thy* God."

The first of the Ten Words, אֲנִי, "I am the Lord, your God," is supplemented by the second, לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה: "Make no other gods unto yourselves from that which is in the heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth." Have you, O man, ever conceived, with your intellectual vision, the necessary ex-



istence of a God? Then must that God be One—an Only One. Read God's wondrous work in the stars and the planet-sown heavens; wander amid the manifold beauties of Nature; penetrate, if you will, to earth's deepest depths, but do not deify the Master's work. Well may you stand in awe of God's creative power and bow down to the dust in worship of that Wisdom which has brought it forth and which maintains it. Deny the all-embracing lovingkindness of God in creation, and creation is doomed to perish, to crumble into its primæval atoms (Job xxxiv, 14):

אם ישים אליו לבו ורוחו ונשמתו אליו יאספ יגוע כל בשר  
יחריו :

But do not deny! Denial is the cancer that is eating ever deeper into the very vitals of modern Judaism. Because man, with his freedom of thought—the free gift of God—has been enabled to guess at the highest truths concerning God, in his immeasurable conceit, he presumes to deny Him. Therefore the second Word commands לא תעשה: “Make no other Gods unto yourselves from that which is in the heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth.”

And as this, your God, the One and Only One purely spiritual, and therefore incapable of being

represented in any physical form, is only disclosed to your profoundest research, so is He, too, the embodiment of all moral perfection. Hence, the third Word, לא תשא: "Take not the name of the Lord, your God, in vain." Truth is the seal of God; do not desecrate it by deceit and hypocrisy. Seek rather to perfect yourselves by the development of your natural talents and your wonderful faculties.

Therefore, זכור את־יום השבת, "Remember the Sabbath day." Do not labor exclusively for the things of earth. You are a citizen of two worlds; let the spiritual portion of your nature have its rightful share in Sabbaths and holy days.

כל המתפלל בערב שבת ואומר ויכולו נעשה שותף לקב"ה

"He who labors during the six days of the week and can say on the eve of the Sabbath 'I have completed my work and will now take up my labor for my soul,' such a one becomes a co-worker with God."<sup>15</sup> For God gave man only his physical existence, endowing him, however, with the possibilities of a spiritual life. Man has the power to develop these possibilities and is therefore responsible for the creation of himself into a spiritual, moral and ethical being. If he thus makes himself the creator of his better self, he becomes, in a literal sense, a co-worker with God.

Thus both in outward form and inner content, the first four Words hang close together. They constitute an elevating means to the great end of self-sanctification and moral perfection. They form the substance of our spiritual consciousness and prescribe our relations with, and our duty towards God;—they indicate, that is to say, our service to God, our form of worship—and as such, they are the second foundation on which the moral order rests and without which no support, no firmness is conceivable.

An ancient teacher, R. Akiba, indicates this truth symbolically:

כשתגיעו לאבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים וכו'

“When you see white marble pillars, do not say that they are only idle show and pretence.”<sup>16</sup>

When you have reached the stage when you think that you can dispense with God, when you consider religious worship as so much superfluous ballast, be on your guard; you have lost your bearings; you are simply wandering to and fro, confused by moral error. Therefore, let the Divine Service, the second pillar, be our stronghold and our support.

The third pillar, which supports the edifice of the world, is the Practice of Charity, and a strong support it is. Only through it are the two other

pillars, the knowledge and the worship of God really made steadfast. It is, in truth, the foundation of the first Word: "I am the Lord, your God"; because "I am He who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This act of God was an act of benevolence towards Israel. And if the Israelite endeavors to free himself from spiritual slavery and to perfect himself in the service of God, he, too, performs an act of benevolence towards himself. He gains strength and courage in his struggle against sin. Such divine service is at one and the same time service of God and service of self.

But man has also duties towards his fellow-men, the fulfilment of which is of equal importance to the fulfilment of his duties towards God. Hence the fifth Word: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord, thy God, giveth thee." This Word concludes the series of duties which we owe to God and is at the same time the transition-point to the duties which we owe to Society. Hence God's name is mentioned in connection with the command to honor our parents, as the Being who implants within our hearts such holy emotions.

Respect for the person and property of others is equally of the highest ethical importance, hence

follow the further five Words on the second of the two stone tablets of the Covenant,

לֹא תרצה, לֹא תנאף, לֹא תגנב, לֹא תענה, וְלֹא תחמוד :

“Sacred must be unto you the life, the domestic purity, the property, the good name, and every possession of your neighbor.” To Israel be the glory and the honor of having made these last five Words—the substance of the highest ethical truth and the exercise of which means the practice of LOVE in our daily lives, the basis of his moral code for the individual and the community.

The second half of the Decalogue, it is obvious to everyone, demonstrates that the more abstract first portion is a product of the highest divine truth and wisdom. Intellectual indolence might say of the first half לַכְבוֹד עֲצֻמוֹ הוּא דּוֹרֵשׁ, that God gave the commandments relating to His existence for His own glory. But closely connected with them follow the latter five that have reference to the well-being of mankind, and these lead but to one conclusion: ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֱמֶת “The Lord, your God, is truth.” Truth speaks in the wise commands which direct His will towards us. May they guide our relations to Him, our relations to ourselves and to our fellow-men! May they be the means of firmly establishing the three-fold basis on which our moral ex-

istence rests: the Torah, Divine Worship and the Practice of Charity. In the fulfilment of these essential truths, we must find the real purpose of the holiness of our lives and pursue it with unremitting love. That is what our Sages meant when they taught that the Torah should be to us as if revealed to us anew each day.<sup>17</sup>

In this connection, an ancient writer asks: "How has it come to pass that *Simhath Torah* is celebrated at the end of the *Sukkoth* festival, and not on *Shabuoth*, nearly half a year later than we would have expected? Would it not have been more appropriate to celebrate it on *Shabuoth*, the day of the giving of the Law?" He answers his question with a parable.

"Israel and the Torah are like the union of hearts between a newly-married couple. They have learned to love one another and vow eternal fealty. But how often does it happen that with the lapse of time the bonds that symbolise the union are broken asunder! They have found, on closer study, that they are not suited to each other and they speak the pitiful words: 'If you go to the right, I will go to the left.' But if, by reason of perfect sympathy and heart-harmony, not only the honey-moon, but month after month pass by in ever-increasing joy, day by day revealing to each new virtues and graces in the other, they are filled with greater joy than on their wedding day."



So it is with Israel. On the day of Revelation our ancestors exclaimed נעשה ונשמע—"We will obey and understand" the word of God. What would have happened if the Law had proven distasteful to them? Would not the oath of fealty have been overhasty? But Israel has gone to the depths of the Torah. Day and night, week by week, month after month, he has found precious pearls in its immeasurable depths. As they worthily celebrated the finding of this treasure, so six months later they rejoiced at the knowledge of its worth.

## IV

### THE HIGHEST SERVICE



HAVING completed our introductory survey and considered the foundations of Judaism, we will now discuss specifically the Ethics of Judaism. To this, the maxim of Antigonos of Socho will serve as a fitting prelude:

“Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward;<sup>18</sup> but be like servants who serve their master without expectation of receiving a reward; and let the fear of heaven be upon you.”

In *Aboth d'Rabbi Nathan*, a tradition is preserved, that two of the pupils of Antigonos, erroneously concluding from these words of his, that he did not believe in future rewards and punishments, embodied this belief in their own teaching. Hence arose the two heretical sects, the Sadducees and the Boethusians—from Zadok and Boethos, the respective names of those disciples. These two sects played a great political part at the time of the second temple and estab-

lished a peculiar religious system, characterised by a denial of the doctrine of Reward and Punishment.

Turning from this historical view, the question suggests itself: What did Antigonos desire to convey by his maxim?—for future reward is certainly implied in it. This world has too much of inequality, too much seeming injustice, for us not to assume that there must come a time—if not now, then in the hereafter—when these inequalities will be adjusted and this injustice be redressed. In the thirteen Articles of Faith of Maimonides, which Joseph Albo reduced to three, the acceptance of the principle of שכר ועונש—of God's reconciling Justice—is unquestioned. Let us be just to ourselves. The best among us needs this hope. It reconciles us to self-sacrifice here on earth, because we feel in our hearts that some day, בעלמא דקשט, "in the kingdom of truth," we shall have our reward. What a God would that be who does not call individuals and nations to account for the injustice and the violence which they have committed in this world! In the words of the Talmud: "Who can imagine that God will not make Truth and Justice prevail?"<sup>19</sup> This divine justice, at some time to be executed, is the very foundation of our faith. How, then, could Antigonos have

declared that God should be served without hope of reward? I believe that this difficulty can be solved.

Maimonides in his *Yad ha-hazakah* expounds the two motives from which God may be served. The lower motive he designates as עבודה מיראה—"the service of God from fear." The higher motive is עבודה מאהבה—"the service of God from love." Job's piety was of the former kind. As Satan suggested: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, about all that he hath on every side. . . . But put forth Thy hand now, and destroy all that he hath; he will renounce Thee to Thy face." (Job i, 9-11.) Subsequent events proved the truth of the charge. Though at first he stood steadfast under the divine dispensations, Job soon raised his voice blasphemously against God.

This kind of piety may be called slavish fear of retribution. This fear is not a reverential awe—the slave is not amenable to such an emotion. He measures his service by the standard of reward and punishment.

Abraham stands on a far higher plane. He, the sorely-tried, childless patriarch, is promised that his descendants shall be as numerous as the stars in heaven. But how could this be,

seeing that he was already ninety-nine years old and childless? And yet be believed in God and deemed his trust his greatest virtue. (Gen. xv, 6.) והאמין בה' ויחשביה לו צדקה. He served God from pure love. He loved God as a child loves its father. His love was not that of slavish fear. Only one excels this man of faith, who from love of God was willing to sacrifice what was dearest to him—his only son. That man was Moses, who brought a still greater sacrifice. Not because he *died* for his people, but because he *lived* for them. His courage to live was the bravest sacrifice.

To lay down one's life for a great idea is by no means as noble a thing as to live for it, in the face of deprivation, calumny and apparent failure. The founder of Christianity, the daughter of Judaism, became great *only through his death*. Moses became great *through his life*, through his unremitting effort to develop a nation of slaves into a nation of moral men. His example, which enabled his people, despite a world of adversaries, torn from its national soil, to maintain itself by the strength of the religious idea, exercised the greatest influence on the development of humanity. And how did Moses teach the people the love of the religious idea? His final exhortation to them furnishes the answer. "And now, Israel, what

doth the Lord, thy God, require of thee but to *fear* Him, to walk in all His ways, to *love* him and to serve Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deut. x, 12.)

But it may be asked: Is not too much here required? Can more be demanded than the fear and love of God with entire heart and soul? The question already suggested itself to our Talmudists, who asked: *אטו יראת שמים מילתא זוטרתא היא?*—"Is the fear of God so small a matter, that Moses seems to take it as a matter of course?"—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear him?" They answer: *אין. לגבי משה מילתא זוטרתא היא* — "Yes," in the eyes of Moses, the fear of God was an easy matter."<sup>20</sup>

I must admit that the answer at first sight seems unsatisfactory. We may ask here in Talmudic phrase: *אטו כל עלמא מיגמר גמירא?*—"Is the whole world composed of learned men?" Is all Israel composed of spiritual masters like Moses? If the fear of God was so easy a matter to Moses, which he was justified in requiring of his people, could every one of them aspire to his high level of spiritual culture and his deep inner faith?

But after what has been said, the difficulty is easily solved. The lower grade of divine service—



slavish fear, at least, could be expected of every one. Even the lowest among the people, who had heard God's voice and seen His wonders, must have felt the primitive fear, the servile awe which slaves entertain for their masters. Even the dullest of the people must have perceived that transgression of the divine commands brought punishment in its train. How, then, could man dare to disobey the commands of his God and not fear His retribution?

Hence Moses said: "What less can the Lord, your God, require of you, than to fear Him? This answers completely the question of the Talmud: "Is the fear of God so small a matter?" In the eyes of Moses, the lower grade of divine service is indeed an easy matter. So much everyone must feel, as well as his duty to walk in the ways of God.

But the thinking Israelite, seeking to emulate his great exemplar, Moses, will strive to lift himself from the lower stage—the *עבודה מיראה*, to the higher stage *עבודה מאהבה*, from *fear* to *love*—to love the Lord, his God, with all his heart and soul, as the child loves its father.

Malachi, recalling Moses, *זכרו תורת משה עבדי*, admonishes his degenerate contemporaries: *ועיניכם תראינה ואתם תאמרו יגדל ה'*, "Your eyes have seen, and you yourselves say 'Great is the Lord.'

Yet you do not conduct yourselves according to that consciousness." (Mal. i, 5.) And he proceeds: "A son honoreth his father and a slave his master. If I am your father, where is your honor of me? And if I am your master, where is your fear of me?" (v. 6.)

Now we can understand the saying of Antigonos: "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward; but be like servants who serve their master without expectation of receiving a reward; and let the fear of heaven be upon you." When will you serve God thus unselfishly and the fear of heaven be upon you? When you constantly live in the fear of God, when you are dominated by the thought that an all-seeing Eye rests upon you and the love of God is in you.

The fear of retribution may serve as an incentive for the most uncultured heathen. But the fear of God which is merely the fear of punishment cannot prove effective in the presence of temptation. If only fear sustains our hope and expectation of reward our virtuous tendencies, when conflict arises between virtue and imagined advantage, we shall be irretrievably lost; and though we began bravely, we shall end in despair. Therefore, away with selfish fear and let filial love, as exemplified by Abraham, taught by Moses

and recalled by Antigonos of Socho, take its place in all our thinking, feeling and doing. Then shall we be, indeed, "children of the Lord, our God."

## V

### THE LEARNED AND THE POOR



THE following two sentences from the Ethics are intimately connected and we therefore treat them together: the sayings, namely, of José ben Joezer and of José ben Johanan.

José ben Joezer said: "Let thy house be a meeting-place for the wise; sit amidst the dust of their feet,<sup>21</sup> and drink their words with thirst."

José ben Johanan said: "Let thy house be open wide, and let the poor be members of thy household."

The first of these sayings sets forth *theoretical* Judaism, while the latter propounds *practical* Judaism.

"Let your house be a meeting-place for the wise"—tell me with whom you associate and I will tell you what you are. The measure of the culture of a people is the support and esteem it metes out to Art and Science. A people ranks, among civilised nations, according as it honors its great men. Hence the monuments of

bronze and stone which men have reared to perpetuate the memory of the great.

The monotheistic nation of the Jews, having God as its highest ethical ideal, never erected such memorials. As its highest ideal defied every attempt at material representation by chisel and brush, it was felt that the national memorials of its great men, likewise, should not be perpetuated by these means. Yet, more than any other nation, did this people understand how to honor its great men, for it honored them by the perpetuation of their thoughts and deeds. Is not the memory of Moses and of the Maccabees more truly preserved in the hearts of our people than they could have been preserved by means of monuments, however artistically executed? As the Talmud well expresses the truth:

אין עושין נפשות לצדיקים מעשיהן הן הן זכרונם :

"We do not erect monuments for our great men; their deeds are their best memorial." <sup>22</sup>

Our Jewish literature, which in its rich content can hold its own with that of any nation, owes its existence and development to the reverence which the Jewish people has ever borne towards its learned men. The over-zealous anxiety, however, to preserve everything that the Sages ever said, that characterized the ancients, has not been

without its disadvantages. A glance at that gigantic work, the Talmud, will make this abundantly evident. This work, which was more than six hundred years in the making, embodies the thoughts and sayings of men of the most varied degrees of culture. It has perpetuated some Haggadistic utterances which might, perhaps, have better not been immortalized. Not that morality would place its veto upon a single one of them, but because many of them are only of antiquarian interest, whose significance for the history of culture is doubtful, inasmuch as the key to their meaning is lost. Even at the present time, so strong is the feeling of reverence among the pious of the old school, for the Jewish printed sheet and manuscript, that they would not think of putting loose leaves inscribed with Hebrew letters to profane uses; and would rather bury or burn the page, which might possibly contain the name of God, lest the name of God be thereby profaned.

And as the products of Jewish learning were honored, so were its learned men, though these never formed a distinct class in Israel. The consciousness of the people, however, which is reflected in the Talmud, did make a distinction between the *עם הארץ* and the *תלמיד חכם* — the ignorant and the learned. The



former was revered, the latter looked upon with contempt.

"He who does not rise from his seat in the presence of a scholar," says the Talmud, "shows bad manners."<sup>23</sup>

"How many fools there are, who stand reverently in the presence of the dead parchment of the Torah and kiss it as it is carried past, but who do not stand in the presence of the Jewish Sages, the living upholders of the Torah."<sup>24</sup>

"Whoever offends the honor of a Jewish Sage, wounds the honor of God; but he who honors a Sage, extends hospitality to the majesty of God."<sup>25</sup>

This glorification of learning did not arise from self-admiration on the part of the Jewish Sages, but from the veneration for Jewish learning which, they declared, proceeded from a divine source.<sup>26</sup>

גדולה דעה שנתנה בין שתי אותיות שנאמר כי אל דעות ה' :

And because the Jewish Sage, נאה דורש ונאה מקיים, "whose life exemplified his teaching," (the wise hypocrite was not esteemed as a scholar—he was called ממרא, זקן ממר, "a rebel against God,") was held in highest honor, intercourse with the learned was deemed most desirable. Hence José ben Joeser taught: "Let thy house be a meeting-place for the wise; sit amidst the dust of their feet, and drink their words with thirst."

And yet glorification of Jewish learning and association with the wise embodies only the *theoretical* estimation of Judaism. It is imperfect unless it is supplemented by the *practical*. This completion is supplied by José ben Johanan, in his saying: "Let thy house be open wide, and let the poor be the members of thy household"—Let your intercourse be with the wise, but not at the expense of the poor. To them, as to the wise, let your house be opened wide. בל האומר אין לי אלא תורה אפילו תורה אין לו—“He who says: ‘My only concern is the Torah,’ but who does not *act* in accordance with its humane behests; who is a Jew only in theory; though his mouth be ever so full of its praise, has but little Torah in his heart.”<sup>27</sup> He who views his Judaism only as an abstract philosophy, has but a narrow conception of his religion. He, only, who lives his life in accordance with its teachings and the practices that spring from them, grasps it in its full meaning.

The ancients have beautifully expressed this truth.

האוחז ספר תורה ערום נקבר ערום : ערום סלקא דעתך ?  
אלא ערום בלא מצות :

“He who takes hold of the Torah naked, will be buried naked.” “What is meant by ‘the

Torah naked'?" asks the Rabbi. And he answers: "It is the Torah without its practical commands."<sup>28</sup> He who keeps in view only theory, regards the Torah only as a subject for study and neglects its practical commands. In his hands, the Torah is naked. He has stripped it of its most beautiful garment, and he goes hence naked, his soul disrobed of its finest adornment—the מצות ומעשים טובים.

Hence among the choicest of the ethical maxims is that of José ben Johanan: "Let the poor be members of thy household." Does this mean that the beggar shall have the right to instal himself as a member of your household? By no means. Its meaning is evident. Your business often compels economy in your expenditures. Where do you begin to economize? Do you limit the gratification of your own desires? No. Your table is set as luxuriously as ever, you are as extravagant in your dress. In fact, it is frequently the case that your outward show is heightened to conceal your impoverished circumstances. On whom do you curtail your expenses first? Shall I tell you? It is on the poor. Therefore did the ethical teacher exhort us: "Let the poor be members of thy household."

Let us view the other side of the picture. Your business circumstances have changed for the better; prosperity has entered your house. Your

*Zedakah*, however, remains the same; you are not one whit more liberal. This, according to the witty interpretation of an old commentator, is the meaning of the verse in the Book of Psalms (Ps. cxii, 3): הון ועושר בביתו וצדקתו עומדת לעד—"His wealth and riches *remain in his house*, while his charity continues ever the same—poor and contemptible."

The sayings of José ben Joezer and José ben Johanan find an apt illustration in the generosity of American Judaism, as exemplified by its liberal support of its religious schools. Here thousands of our children receive instruction in the principles of our holy religion, become acquainted with Israel's spiritual heroes and are inspired with the ambition to emulate them.

## VI

### THE TEACHER AND THE FRIEND



THE teachings in the Ethics are, as a rule, truths of experience, whose applicability is not limited to the circumstances that called them forth, but are of general application. Such is the maxim of Joshua ben Perahiah:

עשה לך רב וקנה לך חבר והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות :

“Provide thyself a teacher, get thee a friend, and judge all men charitably.”

Whoever is acquainted with the career of the author of this maxim will recognise that it is the outcome of his own experience. Yet, as we have already remarked, it is of general applicability.

It is an incontestable truth that every one, in every sphere of life, sets up for himself some model after which to shape his career. Originality is a fine thing—a sure road to fame; but originality has its limitations. One would be bold, indeed, to assert that SELF should always be its own model, that nothing proffered by another should

ever be accepted. He who would put this principle into practice would not speak like others, eat like others, nor dress like others. He would expose himself to the ridicule of mankind and be regarded as eccentric.

Certain usages have been accepted for the guidance of human society. These rules for conduct do not have to be constantly investigated as to their source and origin. It is enough that they are generally accepted and that they cannot be transgressed with impunity. As the Talmud states this truth:

עולם כמנהגו נוהג ושומים שקלקלו עתידים ליתן את הדין :

“The world regulates itself in accordance with its customs; the fool who would make light of these customs, the world will call him to account.”<sup>29</sup>

And if this is true in the ordinary affairs of life, why not in Religion? What would become of us if every one, in his own conceit, were to recognise only himself as his own highest authority and were to attempt to force his views upon the world? No wise man acts thus. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but a wise man hearkeneth unto counsel.” (Prov. xii, 15.)

In religious ideas, especially, must the past centuries be considered. Here the opinions of the Sages, which have guided, comforted and strength-



ened our people throughout their long, sad dispersion, should not be disregarded. If we would burn the bridges behind us which unite the present with the past, deserting the beaten paths which our fathers have made for us—pursuing rather untrodden paths, 'mid thorns and brambles, that lead to religious chaos, it might indeed be said of us: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end of that way is death." (Prov. xiv, 12.)

Our religious guide is the Torah, the Law of Moses, interpreted and applied in the light of tradition. But inasmuch as individual opinion cannot be valid for the whole community, it behooves individuals and communities to appoint only recognised authorities as teachers; such men, that is to say, as acknowledge belief in authority, and who, at the same time, with comprehension and tact, are willing to consider what may be permitted in view of the exigencies of the times, and what may be discarded, without changing the nature and character of the foundations of the faith.

This is the impression conveyed by the maxim of Joshua ben Perahiah. "Provide thyself a teacher"—a teacher recognised by you as an authority, who is bound by the moral obligation and empowered to meet your religious needs

according to the circumstances of time and place. The congregation must appoint its teacher to labor for its welfare to the best of his ability, and the teacher esteem it his highest privilege to further its interests; but the congregation must recognise its obligation to yield authority to its appointed teacher, and to be guided by his teachings, whether they be difficult or easy.<sup>30</sup> צורבא מרבנן דמרחמין ליה בני מתא וכו' — "A rabbi's popularity does not prove that he is faithful to his trust." It may sometimes happen that a teacher is beloved by every one of his people, because he surrenders himself to the will of the people, permitting the crooked to pass for the straight and the straight for the crooked, just as the whim of the congregation may dictate. The conscientious teacher will not swerve from his religious convictions to please the transient whims of his congregation. Note, again, the words of Joshua ben Perahiah: עשה לך רב "*Provide thyself a teacher*"; recognise him as authority. He did not say קנה לך רב "*Purchase a teacher for thyself*." However large his salary may be, it must not serve to purchase his religious convictions or to bribe his conscientious scruples.

I have often wished that the times might be so fashioned again that the Rabbi, as in olden days, should receive no compensation. In the

thirteenth century, it was necessary to procure the permission of the great Talmudist, R. Meir, of Rothenburg, to pay a salary to the congregational officer, which had become necessary under changed conditions. If our rabbis to-day were, like the Levites of old, unpaid teachers, it were better, perhaps, not only for the financial condition of our congregations, but for their religious condition as well. Congregations would no doubt gladly see the ancient dictum of the Talmudists carried out: מה אני בחנם אף אתם בחנם "As God gave you the Torah without price, so should you, teachers in Israel, expound it without reward."<sup>31</sup> But though they would gladly see it, אסיא דמון, במון מנו שויה, "A physician, be he a physician for the body or the soul, who cures without a fee, is of little value."<sup>32</sup> It is questionable, however, whether congregations would welcome an uncompensated Rabbi, unless he were a Reform Rabbi.

The Sages have already indicated this in a witty comment which they made on the words ומקלי יגיד לו "And their staff shall give them advice" (Hosea, xxiv, 12.) They interpret the words as if they read כל המקיל לו יגיד לו—"Only the Reform Rabbi, who makes Religion of easy performance and who never makes use of the rod of rebuke."<sup>33</sup>

The converse applies in the case of the acquisition of a friend. If the teacher is the authority, the friend must be the conscientious counsellor. He is a perennial source of comfort, and no price is too great to pay for such an acquisition. Therefore, "Get thee a friend." Left to yourself, you become a miserable creature. אי חברותא או מיתותא — "It is either friendship or death."<sup>34</sup> The teacher cannot follow your every footstep, your friend can. Furthermore, אין מן הכל זוכה אדם ללמוד "One cannot learn from every teacher."<sup>35</sup> Perhaps your receptive faculties are limited, or the teacher's method may not be suited to you. Your friend, however, can always be relied on; for he teaches you what you *may* do, your enemy, what you *should*. Therefore "Get thee a friend"; and having acquired him, hold him fast at any cost.

"Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel."

But all the aid that a teacher can give you in matters of conscience, all the wise counsels of your friend in worldly matters, cannot make you happy unless you are actuated by feelings of love for humanity. Hence, our Rabbi adds a third phrase to his maxim: "Judge all men charitably"—בצדק תשפוט, הוי דן לכה זכות. "There is no better basis of judgment than Charity."

If, like the Talmudists, you seek good in *every* man, you will not entirely condemn *any* man. Even the most wicked has not completely ceased to be a child of God. Many a one has become submerged in the depths of sin, because you, by your intolerance, have permitted him to bear his burden alone, when you ought, in charitable judgment, to have striven to restore him to self-respect. You, who beat your breasts with pride, boasting of your innocence, who knows how many faults another could find in you? "Everyone," says a great thinker, "carries his burden of sin on his back; he himself does not see it, but his neighbor, who follows behind him, does see it." Therefore our Talmudists urge: הָרֹן לְכַף זְכוּת דַּנִּין, "He who judges others charitably will himself charitably be judged."<sup>36</sup>

Let us act in the spirit of that Talmudic Sage who deemed his long life as a reward from God, for never having despised any man or closed his eyes in sleep without forgiving his enemy.<sup>37</sup> לֹא עָלָה קִלְלַת חֲבֵרֵי עַל מַטְתִּי—

Only with a teacher in authority over us, a friend beside us and charity and humanity in our hearts, can we tread the arduous path of life, in peace of soul, "finding grace and good regard in the sight of God and man," a blessing to Israel and to all mankind.

## VII

### THE WICKED NEIGHBOR



HERE is no rule without exception. Just as it is impossible to view a landscape in its entirety from a single point of view, so it is impossible in the sphere of ethics to concentrate all phases of a subject into a single illustration. "The exception proves the rule," we are taught; and we feel the truth of this, as we place in juxtaposition the maxim in the Mishnah which we last discussed, and the one which immediately follows, and which we will now proceed to consider.

In our last discourse we saw the beauty of the maxim: "Judge every man charitably." In the maxim that follows we meet with an apparent exception:

הרחק משכן רע ואל תתחבר לרשע ואל תתיאש מן הפורענות :

"Keep thee far from a bad neighbor, associate not with the wicked, and abandon not the belief in retribution."

There are limits to tolerance and even to humanity. They are not to be practised under



*all* circumstances. We may be inspired by the noblest motives, but how will they help us if they are rendered futile by wicked neighbor or evil companion? We may be imbued with the superlative value of the inalienable, sacred possessions of freedom and human rights, but what can we accomplish if we cannot follow the paths directed by our hearts, and tyranny, with unrighteous violence, rudely snatches the unfurled banner of our ideals from our hands and tramples it under foot?

The same holds true of our religious inspirations. We have, for example, enjoyed a religious training and arrange our households according to the ritual ordinances. We observe our parents and our grand-parents living in the same sphere of ideas, and we note that they live happily and contentedly under the restraints dictated by Religion. We emulate their example. On Friday nights we assemble the children around our tables to greet the Sabbath angels who seek out all those who consecrate the holy day. Our children sing the prayers of thanks in Hebrew chorus and response. We converse with the younger generation on religious topics, rehearse the story of Israel's glorious career and awaken their enthusiasm for Israel's sorrows and joys. We are happy in the religious atmosphere that pre-

vails, when a knock is heard at the door and a neighbor enters.

"I hope I don't intrude," he says. Etiquette demands the answer: "By no means. Come in and take a seat." "I was just talking to the children," the father continues, "about the beneficent influence of the Sabbath; how it sustained the spirits of our fathers in the olden days and preserved the purity of the home life; how the father, toiling during the week, when Friday night came around, would betake himself to the Synagogue and, returning home, would find wife and children awaiting his presence and blessing. In the peace and happiness that reigned in the household, the sordid cares of the week were forgotten, and FAITH and HOPE again became supreme."

"How can you be so old-fashioned," interposes the neighbor. "I thought that we had outgrown all such things. FREEDOM is the watchword of the times. I see no use in keeping up these old-time ceremonies—the very preachers from their pulpits are holding them up to ridicule. Let me tell you a good joke:

"A Reformer recently met a Conservative. 'Are *you* still alive?' he asked.

"'That is a funny question,' said the Conservative, 'Why do you ask?'

"'Because,' answered the Reformer, 'in your

mode of life you belong to the thirteenth century and not to our modern times. That is why I am surprised that you are still alive.’”

Thus spoke the neighbor, and the children laughed aloud, while the father's brow was wrinkled with pain.

“Keep thee far from a bad neighbor, associate not with godless scoffers—do not imagine that you can escape retribution.” Retribution will come quickly enough. The faith of your children will be quickly poisoned by the bad neighbor, who mocks at the piety of others. They will begin to be ashamed of their ancestral religion. One by one they will abandon our distinctive practices and customs; and the parents, impressed by their glowing accounts of Progress and the saving power of Reform will, in due course, follow their example. To such a family, the prophet's words apply: “The son despiseth his father, the daughter riseth up against her mother; a man's enemies are the members of his own family.” (Micah, vii, 6.)

Therefore, “Keep thee far from a bad neighbor.” Keep aloof from him who would overshadow the purity of your soul with the darkness of his words, who would disturb the peace of your spirit with distracting doubt. You remember the Talmudic proverb: *אוי לרשע ואוי לשכנו* “Woe un-

to the reprobate, and woe unto his neighbor.”<sup>38</sup> In the company of a reprobate, the most upright and pious will be led astray. As the opening verse of the Book of Psalms teaches: “Happy is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” “This means,” say the Sages, “let a man go where wicked people are assembled; at first, he will stand and listen, and in the end will seat himself among them.”

But not only in our religious relations, but in our political relations as well, must we observe the admonition: “Keep thee far from a bad neighbor, associate not with the wicked, and abandon not the belief in retribution.” Contact with an evil neighbor is equally dangerous in both of these spheres. The history of the struggle for American Independence affords a splendid illustration.\* It is a familiar story, that deserves to be inscribed in letters of gold in the annals of our country.

The story takes us back a hundred and nine years. It is a remarkable tale of oppression and persecution. No one could write a letter here without being subjected to the provisions of the infamous Stamp Act. The housewife could not

\* Preached on the Fourth of July, 1885.

serve a cup of tea unless she paid a tax on it. Representations against these iniquitous taxes having been made and rejected, the liberty-loving people of America began the desperate struggle against overwhelming numbers of the British, to cast off the tyrannous yoke of England forever. After numerous skirmishes, a battle was fought at Lexington, on April 18, 1775, and thanks to the energy, the lofty wisdom and splendid generalship of the Commander-in-Chief, George Washington, the English were beaten in the field as early as March of the following year, though many battles had yet to be won, and eight years elapsed before the country was finally rid of "the wicked neighbor," and the power of the tyrant broken.

On the Fourth of July, 1776, just a hundred and nine years ago to-day, the Declaration of Independence was solemnly pronounced by the Continental Congress. The memorable principles of freedom were enunciated in the main, in the following words:

"That all men are created equal; that all have a natural right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that human governments are instituted for the sole purpose of securing the welfare of the people; that the people have a natural right to change their government whenever it becomes destructive of liberty—and that, therefore, the

United Colonies of America are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

These principles of inalienable human rights, in defence of which America's brave sons fought at Lexington, should be celebrated in this Temple, on the national holiday. Not only because we are patriots, but because we are Jews. The principles of the Declaration of Independence are biblical principles, that have been carried to victory in more than one century. Does not the Law of Moses teach from the very beginning that man was created in the image of God and that he must be free? (Gen. 1, 27.) Does not the Law of Moses teach: "One law shall ye have; for the stranger as for the home-born, for I am the Lord, your God." (Lev. xxiv, 22.) As God is the Father of us all, so has each of us the natural right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He who trespasses upon this natural right, transgresses the will of God.

Whenever, therefore, the tyrannical kings of Israel oppressed the people, and by so doing impaired the national fortunes, God sent men gifted with burning eloquence, in the persons of the Prophets who, with the keen-edged sword of withering speech, prepared the downfall of tyranny. And obversely, whenever a just government wielded the scepter of Judah, God



declared His approval by the mouth of these same prophets. Thus Isaiah calls the pious Hezekiah פלא יועץ אל גבור אב־יער שר־שלום (Is. ix, 5.) This name of the prophet seems coined for that “wonderful counsellor,” that “hero of God” who was a “constant father to his country,” and who may be termed its “prince of peace”—George Washington—who based the pillars of the United States upon Right, Justice and Liberty, and gave the impulse for its further development and constant growth.

We see, then, that the ideas of liberty have flowed from the same source as the principles of Religion—from the will of God. The faithful observer of God’s commands is supremely qualified to be a good patriot. We hail with true joy, also, the fact that in this land of liberty fidelity to Religion, in the various denominations, keeps pace with glowing patriotism.

May we, of the house of Israel, who do not fall behind our neighbors in patriotic feeling and activity, emulate them in faith and in Religion! With hearts full of faith and aglow with patriotic impulse, let us cherish the legacy which George Washington bequeathed to us, and may the Almighty strengthen us in our endeavor!

## VIII

### BE GUARDED IN TEACHING



THREE of our ethical maxims stand in intimate connection: those, namely, of Judah ben Tabai, Simeon ben Shatah, and Abtalion.

Judah ben Tabai taught: "As judge, act not the counsel's part. When the parties to a suit are standing before thee, regard them both as guilty; but when they have departed from thy presence, having given thy verdict and they having acquiesced in it, regard them both as innocent."

Simeon ben Shatah adds: "Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and be guarded in thy words, lest through them they may be led to falsify."

Abtalion voices a like caution: "Ye Sages, be heedful of your words, lest ye be exiled to a place of evil waters, and your pupils, who follow you, drink of these waters and die, and the name of God be thereby profaned."

These golden teachings apply not only to the halls of Justice, for which they were first enunciated, but are of universal application—to the merchant in his business, the father in his house-

hold, the teacher in his vocation and the judge in the conduct of his office. They are applicable, too, in the sphere of Religion, and to this sphere we will restrict our consideration to-day. Let us, then, enter the house of God, view the audience, listen to the sermons, and recall to preachers and hearers alike the words of our three ethical teachers.

Men and women who attend the Synagogue and Temple regularly do so primarily, to satisfy the needs of their souls. But as a matter of practical experience, what attitude do our congregants assume towards the teaching there imparted? In what spirit do they desire to have their spiritual needs satisfied? Some desire to be entertained by apt anecdotes, others by explanations of Holy Writ, others wish to listen to spirited rebukes of the degenerate tendencies of the times, while some—and their number is not inconsiderable—caring little for edification or instruction, crave merely entertainment for their ears. They go the rounds from one Synagogue to another, to see which pleases them best, and which is most liberal in thought.

Various, then, as are the motives which bring them to the Synagogue, what course shall the preacher pursue, that he may utilise the hours to best advantage? The three maxims which we

have quoted furnish wholesome advice to the preacher: "As judge, act not the counsel's part"—"Be not a partisan judge." "Do not act as an advocate for one party or the other, but seek justice for both, as if both were guilty. And when they are gone, having rendered your decision, consider them both as reconciled."

Now, who are the two parties who to-day present themselves for trial before the righteous Judge—in our case, the upright Rabbi, and who, after judgment has been rendered, are to be treated with tolerance? They are REFORM and ORTHODOXY. To approach the trial with prejudice, with partisanship, would be to sin against Truth.

וליושב על המשפט, זה הדין דין אמת לאמתו

"The just judge is he who judges truth according to the truth."<sup>39</sup> And what is meant by the phrase "judging truth according to the truth?" Let me illustrate this by an example: the question of validity of the Law of Moses and its rabbinical interpretation.

If a Rabbi wished to express himself according to the tastes and religious views of his hearers, he must know every one of them; he must have studied the mode of life of every one of them; he must have searched the thoughts and sentiments of every one of them. Were he possessed

of this superhuman knowledge and treated his theme as his audience demanded, he would not be "judging truth according to the truth," but in accordance with the ascertained wishes of his hearers. As often as their views and tastes changed, so often would his views change. There would be no absolute truth for him, truth which is his from personal conviction. Truth would be forced upon him, by others, from without. *The truth which the Rabbi possesses must come from himself, and from within; from the Divine Book, from his thorough study of the development of Judaism. He cannot acquire it agreeably to the fluctuating principles of changing fashion.*

Hence the Rabbi should observe the behest: "Be not the advocate of your listeners." Dispense your teachings, not as your hearers wish, but as your convictions dictate. Mosaic-rabbinical Law, which has preserved Judaism through the centuries, cannot, in our day, have degenerated into something of a base character. If, in the opinion of some of our preachers and laymen, it has thus degenerated, this degeneration is not to be charged to the Law but to its expounders. כִּי לֹא דָבָר רַק הוּא מִכֶּם—"For this Law is no vain thing for you," said Moses; and the Talmud aptly comments on the words: אִם רַק מִכֶּם הוּא, "If it becomes a vain thing, it is only

through yourselves, through your own emptiness.”<sup>40</sup> No Rabbi, worthy of the name, would willingly assume the rôle of a Ham uncovering the nakedness of his father. If he finds aught in his religion that is faulty, he will reverently cover it and not expose it to the world. Perhaps what he deems faulty is not faulty after all!

Not every suggestion which you set up as revealed truth to-day and to-morrow pronounce as error, not every whim of fashion, for the defence of which you are to-day applauded and to-morrow stoned, should determine your judgment and the nature of your teachings. “Scrutinize carefully the testimony of the witnesses.” Examine those who lived before you—the thinkers, sages and heroes of the faith, who cheerfully bore persecution and misery for their religion and in the cause of which they surrendered life itself. And you, more fortunate son of happier times, in a country of liberty, acknowledging the beautiful religion of your fathers—you accept no witnesses, you listen to no voice but your own, and would enunciate *your* teachings as those of Judaism! “Weigh carefully your words, lest the untutored be led into error through your teachings.”

This warning is particularly addressed to the teachers in Israel. Because of the differences of intelligence and education in the members of our



congregations, how often are our plainest words misunderstood? How often are not motives attributed to the preacher, undreamed of by him; and personal allusions sought and found which he never had in mind? How much more likely is this to be the case, when his message is ambiguous and open to misconstruction. "Ye Sages, be heedful of your words, lest ye be exiled to a place of evil waters, and your pupils who follow you, drink of these waters and die, and the name of God be thereby profaned."

The word of God, "like the waters of Shiloah that go softly," (Is. viii, 6.) should lead us gently, refresh us like water from the bubbling spring. It should not be like a turbid stream, filled with poisonous weeds. Distorted teachings and heretical doctrines are poisonous elements that will ruin the strongest body. The young, eager to learn, may easily become inoculated by these poisonous teachings, and die—be lost to Judaism forever.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the water," says the prophet. (Is. lv, 1.) Come, listen to the word of God.

"Why," ask the Sages, "is the word of God compared to water?" And they answer:

מה מים מניחין מקום גבוה והולכין למקום נמוך אף דברי  
תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שרעתו שפלה :

"As water flows from the heights and seeks

the lowly places, so does the word of God find a resting-place in him only, who is of a lowly spirit.”<sup>41</sup>

He who, conscious of his own infallibility, reviles the past, describes the shining lights of Israel as men of darkness, holds up to public ridicule the laws which have been piously observed through the centuries—such a one leads his pupils to “the evil waters.” And when, to make matters worse, such teachings are set forth in the public prints, there is a profanation of God’s holy name. No good Jew would commit such sacrilege.

Our Sages consider *’Hillul Hashem* the greatest of all sins. They have left us many a weighty word that embodies their views:

מוטב שיעבור ע”ז ואל יחלל ש”ש בפרהסיא “Rather idolatry than public profanation of the name of God.”<sup>42</sup>

מוטב שתעקר אות אחת מן התורה ואל יחלל ש”ש “Rather remove a letter from the Torah, than profane the name of God.”<sup>43</sup>

נוח לו לאדם שיעבר עבירה בסתר ואל יתחלל ש”ש בפרהסיא: “It were better that a man should sin in secret than publicly to profane the name of God.”<sup>44</sup>

כל מקום שיש חלול השם אין חולקין כבוד לרב: “Wherever there is *’Hillul Hashem*, we do not honor a man as Rabbi.”<sup>45</sup>

Obversely, it may be stated, the Rabbi was highly esteemed, who strove to reconcile the views

brought about by changed conditions with the teachings of the Sages; for thus, it was declared, would the name of God be sanctified. It was said of a great teacher of the Mishnah: חכם גדול אתה, שקיימת דברי חכמים, "You are a great Sage, for you have confirmed the teachings of the Sages who preceded you."<sup>46</sup>

Such scholars may we be! May it be our ambition to strengthen, not to abolish; to remove lax religious views and to preserve the ancient Jewish spirit. I direct this exhortation not to any individual, but to all—myself included. Would that we all, Rabbis and laymen alike, might heed the words of the great Maimonides:

כל בית ישראל מצווין על קדוש השם הגדול הזה שנאמר:  
ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל :

"The whole house of Israel is obligated to honor the name of God, as it is said, 'I will be honored in the midst of the children of Israel.'"<sup>47</sup>

If we discuss our religious affairs outside and give our enemies occasion for malignant joy, we bring dishonor on God's name. Let us fight out all mooted points among ourselves, and when the contesting parties have departed, let us consider them as reconciled, and not give cause for hatred from without. In the halls of learning, warfare—in life, peace. Thus was it in the days of Hillel and Shammai. So may it be with us!

## IX

### EXPIATE THE SINS OF YOUTH



OF unquestionable worth, and especially in this country, is the maxim of Shemaiah:

אהב את המלאכה ושנא את  
הרבנות ואל תתודע לרשות.

“Love work, hate lordship, and seek not intimacy with the ruling power.”

Nowhere is this maxim so well observed as it is in America. Labor is the watchword of all classes. Here, a man is “worth” only as much as his labor, be it with hand or brain, hammer or shovel or axe, or with pen, chisel or brush. The American citizen, too, shuns “lordship”—the possession of power. Jew and non-Jew alike are imbued with the principle of equality. Here, class distinctions have long been extinct.

The religion of the American is Labor. Here, גדול הנהנה מיגיעה מירא שמים “The honest laborer, who eats the fruit of the labor of his hands, is of more consequence than the mere man of piety.” <sup>48</sup>

"Flay a carcase in the street and take a wage for it, and do not say I am a great man and such work is beneath me"<sup>49</sup>—that well-known maxim of the Rabbis finds most general acceptance:

פשוט נבילתא בשוקא ושקיל אנרא, ולא תימא בהנא אנא  
וגברא רבא אנא, וסניא בי מילתא.

And with his belief in the religion of Labor goes hand in hand his belief in the principle of Equality. Here, offices of honor and trust are not the exclusive possession of any one class—they belong to every one who proves himself worthy of them. Thus has the maxim of the ancient Mishnaic teacher been fulfilled in the New World.

These thoughts may furnish a fitting prelude to our meditations on this "Sabbath of Mourning," the Sabbath that precedes the Ninth of Ab. May we mention this date without being decried as retrogressive? But is it really shameful for a man to recall his youth, to bring to mind his youthful follies—especially when honest introspection shows him that he has not yet liberated himself entirely from them?

The Ninth of Ab! fateful date in Jewish history! What memories it recalls! Picture the agony of a man reared in poverty who, by unremitting

toil and unceasing thrift, has amassed enough to acquire a home for his family. He settles down, a happy man. But soon, alas, a fire breaks out; his home is reduced to ashes and he himself to beggary.

Time, which heals all things, deals kindly with him. He gathers his energies anew; again he begins his race after fortune; and again, after years of unwearied toil and endeavor, amasses sufficient to erect upon the ruins of his former home, a house more beautiful than the first. His former misery is forgotten and life for him once more assumes a happy aspect.

But his happiness is destined not to continue for long. Soon, once more, is heard the cry of "fire," and in a few hours, the proud work of years is again reduced to ashes and he himself once more a beggar. Picture the misery of his soul as he contemplates the smouldering ruins of his happiness. "Whence shall come my help?" עזרי מאין יבא עזרי? he cries in anguish, and to his heart there comes the answering word: עזרי מעם ה', "My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." (Ps. cxxi, 1.) The answer comforts him wonderfully. He takes heart again and begins the work of life anew.

For the third time, he achieves prosperity. But, taught by painful memories and experience, he is



afraid to risk all he possesses in a house of stone and wood. The place, too, which was twice the scene of his misfortune, fills him with dread. So, far away he wanders, to seek a home in the wide world. But before he leaves the spot where so much happiness and so many sorrows had been his, he solemnly vows that once a year he would return thither, in order that the experiences of his past life might never become blurred in his memory, and that his soul might never lose the consolation of the trust in God that had sustained him in his well-nigh overwhelming misfortunes.

Now who is this child of misfortune of whom we have been speaking? In truth, it is Israel. Twice did Israel see his politico-national independence established and twice he saw it crumble to pieces. Twice had he to cry out in agonizing lamentation: מִמְרוֹם שָׁלַח אֵשׁ בְּעִצְמוֹתַי וַיִּרְדָּנָה. "From on high hath He sent fire into my bones and it prevailed against them." (Lam. i, 13.) Twice had he to grasp the wanderer's staff. In fulfilment of the prediction of the prophet Jeremiah, he had twice to weep for the twofold night of misfortune of the Ninth of Ab, in which God "emptied His wrath upon wood and stone."

But while the walls of Zion have fallen and the holy place has been reduced to ashes, God still remains to him; and with Him, the Unchangeable

One, is Israel's existence bound up. "As I have never changed," say our Sages, "so you, house of Jacob, have never perished; nor will you ever perish. As you are united to the Lord, your God, so shall you remain forever."<sup>50</sup>

Israel's misfortunes are to him a fountain of perennial inspiration. טוב לגבר כי ישא עול בנעוריו  
"It is good for a man that he has borne the yoke in his youth." (Lam. iii, 27.) So year by year, on the anniversary of his misfortunes, Israel returns—at least in thought—to the scene of his sorrows, recalls the sins of his youth, and piously resolves to rid himself of them.

—חטא חטאה ירושלם על כן לגידה חיתה.

"Jerusalem sinned grievously, therefore did she become as one unclean." (Lam. i, 8.) The first Temple was destroyed—so the Talmud tells us—because of the prevailing sins of idolatry, murder and incest.<sup>51</sup> The second Temple was destroyed because of the שנאת חנם—"gratuitous hatred" that was general in Israel.<sup>52</sup> And this *Sinath 'Hinnom* is a grievous sin!

The first sins of his youth—the three capital sins of the period of the first Temple—have, thank God, long ago been banished from the camp of Israel. But how about the sin that brought the Israel of the second Temple nearly

to the verge of destruction—*Sinath 'Hinnom*? Is this extinct, or does fraternal hate still rage to-day and party-contention storm, as afore-time? Do not our Orthodox, as well as our Neologians, still fan the flames of animosity against each other—unholy flames that are destroying the very life of Israel?

Israel! aged youth! When will you finally lay aside your ancient youthfulness? Have you not yet learned your lesson in the school of life—you, “the man who has seen affliction by the rod of God’s wrath?” (Lam. iii, 1.) Have you not suffered enough from this party-hatred that has wrought such devastation in your spiritual, religious and social life? Must we forever hear the lament: “Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we must bear the punishment for their iniquities?” (Lam. v, 7.) So long as we sin against ourselves, so long as we continue this mutual hatred, so long will God not forgive us. God helps those who help themselves. “Love work,” cried Shemaiah; and his maxim is not an exhortation merely to physical labor; it applies equally to the religiously creative spirit. “Shun lordship.” Let none wish to demonstrate his superiority over others, but with considerate, loving co-operation, let all labor for the communal weal.

If our teachers, particularly those who have the good fortune to occupy prominent positions, pursue their own individual paths, proud only of their fat benefices, of them might it be said: *אוי לרבנות שמקברת את בעליה* "Woe to the rabbin-ate that destroys him who administers it";<sup>53</sup>—for, with plenty in sight, they who seek for religious nourishment may famish for lack of food.

If religion is neglected among our congregations, if the home life is not what it should be, the fault is largely to be laid at the door of our Rabbis, who have failed to urge sufficiently the claims of the Jewish religious life. This was the trouble at the time of our national independence—the great men in Israel had failed to utilize their power and their opportunity to strengthen the religious life.

לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שלא הוכיחו זה את זה.

"Jerusalem was destroyed only because the teachers did not reprove each other."<sup>54</sup> Hence it is our duty as Rabbis, to set forth the truth with all impressiveness, to examine our faith to its very foundations, to pull up the weeds of religious indifference that have been allowed to grow luxuriantly; in order that a better state of things may arise.

כל העונה אמן בכל כחו פותחין לו שערי גן עדן.

“He who proclaims his religious message with courage, to him will be opened the gates of Paradise”<sup>55</sup>—that is to say, such a one paves the way for better things, for a more beautiful future.

Be not ashamed of your past. Hold sacred that which was sacred to your ancestors. Rejoice on the occasions when they rejoiced, and grieve at the times when they grieved. Fast on the great national day of mourning, the Ninth of Ab; for it is becoming to the man who has achieved happiness to recall the days of misfortune of his youth.

כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחתה.

“He who mourns for Jerusalem will some day rejoice in its glory.”<sup>56</sup>

May the spiritual Zion, the Jerusalem of true piety, be soon rebuilt!

## X

### THE PRIESTLY PEOPLE



ILLEL, one of the greatest of the Tannaim, and one of the most influential men produced by Judaism, taught:

הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום,  
אוהב את חבריו ומקרבן לתורה.

“Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving thy fellow-creatures, and drawing them near to the Torah.”

This thought, worthy of him who uttered it, can best be understood in connection with the Sabbath of Consolation.\* This Sabbath, which has received its name from the opening words of its *Haphtarah*: “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,” נחמו נחמו עמי, stands in marked contrast with the Sabbath that precedes it—the “Sabbath of Mourning.” While the former recalls to us the setting star of Israel’s political independence, the latter reveals to us that other star,

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\* Preached on Sabbath Na’hmu.



which arose in the firmament of Israel's dispersion. If our tearful glances on the Sabbath of Mourning and on the Ninth of Ab, were projected back to fields covered with the bleaching bones of men who fought bravely for liberty, on this Sabbath, we hear the voice of consolation: יחי מתים "Thy dead live." (Is. xxvi, 19.) They await with rejoicing those who are now sunk into the dust. If, last week, we listened to Jeremiah the prophet of affliction, voicing the grief of his people as he sends to the scattered sons of Judah his mournful dirges to buried liberty, to-day we listen to another divinely-appointed prophet: "Get thee to the mountain top, thou that bringest good tidings to Zion. Lift up thy voice with strength, thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem; say unto the cities of Judah: 'Behold your God'!" (Is. xl, 9.)

How beautiful is this voice of consolation, which is directed to the heart of Jerusalem! Twice had she been punished for her sins—twice had Israel's national existence been brought to an end—and now she receives a two-fold consolation—נחמו נחמו—נחם לנחם—לכל הדורות באתי לנחם—this means, "I would comfort you for all time," say the Sages.<sup>57</sup> "That is why the text reads יאמר אלהיכם "Your God *will* say" and not אמר אלהיכם "Your God *hath said*," which would have been more natural.

These words of the prophet have indeed consoled the Jewish people during their long exile, and they breathe their consoling message also to our own time. Listen once more to the prophet: 'קול קורא במדבר פנו דרך ה' "Hark! One calleth: prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Is. xl, 3.)

These words are at once both a consolation and a message. On his own soil, under national liberty, Israel had not fulfilled his mission, nor had he lived up to his name—ISRAEL—the Champion of God. That he became, only after he had been disciplined in the school of suffering, during his long exile. He who, in the fullness of his national life, inspired by eloquent prophets, psalmists and thinkers, forgot his origin, only after his dispersion became conscious of his mission to the world. He who, under the shade of his own vine and fig-tree, never thought of his vocation, 'neath the shadow of the willows by Babel's streams, voiced his elegiac strains of yearning for his native land: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." (Ps. cxxxvii, 5.)

And his oath has been faithfully kept. In the homeless desert of his dispersion, a new Jerusalem has been established upon the granite foundation

of his monotheistic idea. In his dispersion, Israel appreciated the prophetic call: "In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." In the wilderness of superstition and unbelief by which he was surrounded, Israel prepared the way for the Eternal One. In the desert of moral desolation, Israel hewed out the paths for Right, Truth and Humanity. His watchword through the centuries was מדרבר מתנה "From the wilderness to the camp," ממתנה נחליאל "From the camp to the divine heritage," and מנחליאל במות "From the divine heritage to the heights." (Num. xxi, 18-19.)

These were the stations in the long wanderings of Israel, which mark the stages of his development. With the traveller's staff in one hand and the Torah in the other, Israel journeyed through the wilderness of barbarism and the desert of the then spiritual life. Through his teachings, he gave the world the patrimony of the divine idea and lifted humanity to the heights of civilization. Learning, he taught; and teaching, he learned how to become "a light to the nations." (Is. xlii, 6.) This is the mission of Israel. This is the meaning of the saying of our Sages: ביום שחרב בהמ"ק נולד משיח, "On the day that the Sanctuary at Jerusalem was destroyed, the Messiah

was born”<sup>58</sup>—for it was the extinction of the Jewish State that gave birth to the messianic vocation of Israel—the salvation of humanity. Jewish nationality was now at an end, and the Jew henceforth became a citizen of the World.

Now, how did Israel, thus changed, wield his mighty influence upon the history of mankind? It was by heeding the words of his prophet of consolation: “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the dimly-burning wick shall he not quench,” (Is. xlii, 3.) as he strove after truth and worked, as a priestly people for humanity. Throughout his eventful career, he was “a disciple of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing it.”

כל המצות כתיב בהן כי וכו' ברם הכא בקש שלום ורדפהו.  
בקשהו במקומך ורדפהו ממקום אחר.

“In the case of all other commandments, we are not directed to seek opportunities in order to put them into practice; we are enjoined to perform them when occasion arises. But of peace, it is said: ‘*Seek peace and pursue it;*’ (Ps. xxxiv, 15.)—seek it where you happen to be, and if unsuccessful, pursue it elsewhere.”<sup>59</sup>

Such has ever been Israel’s course. Hunted from place to place, Israel has been a living memorial of the teachings of peace, demonstrating by example how harshness must be softened and

intolerance overcome. Despised and persecuted, he has not only loved peace, but pursued it, "loving his fellow-creatures and bringing them near to the Torah." Through his matchless endurance, his persecutors were often forced to become his admirers, and his influence upon the thoughts and actions of those in whose midst he lived, constantly grew, and Justice and Benevolence obtained as the result of his teaching—though the peoples were not always willing to recognize him as the teacher.

And we can only succeed in our priestly mission, by heeding the further admonition of the prophet of consolation: "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places, a plain;" (Is. xl, 4.) which we will interpret—wherever a command of God is cast down and appears lowly, it shall be lifted up, and by being placed in its proper religious light, be exalted;—and on the other hand, wherever an ungainly custom which, as a crooked path, hinders us in the path to God, we must be given the power to remove it. When we have a Judaism thus strengthened from within and from without, in a representative and authoritative manner, working harmoniously for the future, we shall have founded the new Jerusalem, to which may be applied the

consoling thought of R. Akiba. The story runs as follows: <sup>60</sup>

It happened once that R. Gamaliel, R. Eleazar ben Azariah, R. Joshua and R. Akiba were walking in the vicinity of Jerusalem. When they reached the Temple mount and saw the desolation about them, they rent their garments; and when they reached the spot where the Temple had stood and saw a fox run out from the very site of the Holy of Holies, three of the teachers wept bitterly; but R. Akiba laughed aloud. Rebuked for this, to them, unseemly state of feeling, "You ask me why I am merry," said he; "tell me why you weep?" "Because," said they, "we have seen the fulfilment of Micah's prophecy: "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and the mountain of the Temple as the high places of the forest. (Micah iii, 12.) "This very fulfilment," said R. Akiba, "is to me the best assurance that the prophecy of Zechariah concerning the new Jerusalem will be likewise fulfilled." (Zech. viii, 4.) "Thy words have comforted us," answered his companions.

And we, too, are consoled. The ancient Zion with its sacrificial altar is no more, but the new Zion, with its humane institutions, has taken its place. The old Jerusalem has fallen, but the new Jerusalem, that shall unite all the sons of men,



shall be erected on the old ruins. Be consoled! Awake and stand erect, my people! If you are true to yourselves, true to your priestly vocation, true in the freedom-breathing Present to the fundamental teachings of the Past, you will be paving the way for a glorious future that shall witness the holy cause of Religion served, not only with a broad culture, but with a warm heart as well. Then will this Sabbath of Consolation mean something for the future of Israel and for mankind; for from this Zion the Law will go forth and the Word of God from this Jerusalem.

## XI

### HILLEL'S GOLDEN WORDS



OF the sayings of Hillel, two particularly precious ones have been preserved to us:

“He who would aggrandize his name, destroys it; he who fails to increase his knowledge, decreases what he has; he who does not study, is deserving of death; and he who makes a worldly use of the crown of the Torah, shall waste away.”

His other saying is:

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for mine own self, what am I? And if not now, when?”

Never has a man so expressed his individuality in a saying as here. Only a Hillel could have given expression to these maxims—he whose name has become proverbial for patience, modesty, love of learning and eagerness for the general good. Only a Hillel could have revealed himself thus in his maxims; and only a Hillel would be warranted to command these maxims for emulation. A well-

known incident in his life throws light on the origin of these sayings.

He was a poor youth, we are told, thirsting for knowledge, who declined his rich brother's aid, preferring to support himself and pay the small admission fee required by the school, by daily labor. This fee was half a copper shekel and he regulated his labor, so that when a shekel was earned, he gave the rest of his time to study; the other half defrayed the cost of his scanty food. On one occasion, he lacked the half-shekel to pay the door-keeper; so he mounted the flat roof of the building, and listened at a window which looked into the hall below. It was bitterly cold and he was covered with snow, too numb to move when the lecture ended. Next morning, he was discovered, almost lifeless, and restored to consciousness with much difficulty. When he told his story, it was ordered that he should henceforth pay no entrance fee.

Who could say with greater propriety than Hillel: "He who would aggrandize his name, destroys it?" Had he only intimated that he could not enter the school for lack of the small coin due to the door-keeper, how easy it would have been for him to gain admittance! But the modest Hillel did not wish his name to be praised as one who, though constrained by poverty,

yet sought the house of learning. Rather would he expose himself to danger, than "make a worldly use of the Torah"—use it to gain personal benefit.

If Hillel's principles prevailed among our present disciples of the Torah, we would have fewer world-restorers and saviors of humanity, but we would have a much more peaceful atmosphere, in which we might live in the spirit of our fathers. For many there are who rise up in our day, like the builders of the Tower of Babel, and say: 'Let us make us a name.' (Gen. xi, 4.) They come forward with their novel ideas—alleged "improvements," which are in reality disfigurements, creating a veritable babel of confusion, so that we do not understand one another's speech. (v. 7.) "One asks for bricks and the other brings him mortar; then the former rises up against him and dashes out his brains." <sup>61</sup>

Both brick and mortar are essential in the construction of a building, but they cannot take each other's place. If one is substituted for the other, if instead of hard, durable brick and stone for the foundation of Judaism, the laborer brings only mortar and cement—ornamental materials, useful, indeed, but suitable mainly for superficial decoration, the edifice thus erected, will never be able to stand the wear and tear of stress and storm. And still less, if

the laborers, unable or unwilling to understand each other, in their anxiety to make them a name, fall upon each other with the ready weapon of the pen, and crush each other. Let us heed Hillel's wise counsel: "He who would aggrandize his name, destroys it."

To Rabbis especially, should Hillel's words appeal, leading them from false ambition, unjustifiable eagerness for honors and harmful hankering after fame. Not that ambition, honor and fame are bad in themselves. Useful as "means," they are harmful when pursued as "ends"—"by their own desire accomplished, they bring their own grey hairs in sorrow to the grave." Still we must not be inactive and get into a rut, for "He who fails to increase in knowledge, decreases what he has."

As long as man lives, he must be active, and only as he is active, does he live. Progress is the law of life. יום תעזבני ימים אעזבך. "If you leave me for a single day, says the Torah, I will leave you for two" <sup>62</sup>—which is to say, in other words: You move and I move; if you go backward one day and I go forward, we shall be two days apart. Not to progress, means retrogression.

ת"ח אין להם מנוחה לא בעולם הזה ולא בעולם הבא, שנא' ילכו מחיל אל חיל.

"The disciples of learning have no rest either

in this life or in the next. As it is said: 'They go from strength to strength.'" <sup>63</sup> (Ps. lxxxiv, 8.)

The question for us is, what shall we call Progress in Religion and how can we best conserve our energies? If "Progress" is to be evidenced by destruction and not by construction; if it merely means the giving up of ancient and venerable customs, that have been honored by long usage and which bring comfort to the soul, and offers nothing in their place, then every well-meaning Jew will call such "progress" retrogression. It was a keen observation of the Rabbis, when they remarked:

פסיעה גסה נוטלת א' מת"ק ממאור עיניו של אדם.

"A broad stride robs a man of the five-hundredth part of his vision" <sup>64</sup>—that is to say, our vision is apt to be beclouded when we take too great paces.

In the impetuous haste to abolish time-honored Jewish customs, our historical vision becomes blurred, and we are apt to lose sight of the distinction between the significant and the insignificant, the more and the less important. Hence Hillel teaches: "He who does not study is deserving of death." He who learns nothing from Israel's rich historic past, who does not distinguish between that which is eternally binding and unchangeable and that which is of secondary im-



portance and subject to the circumstances of time and place,—such a one condemns Judaism to stagnation and death.

True, the aesthetic form was not the main thing, to our ancestors; to them, the essential factor was the observance of the Law in the communal and domestic life. But even they voiced the sentiment: *זה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֶנְהוּ, הִתְנַהוּ בְּמִצּוֹת.* “This is my God, and I will glorify Him”; which means, say the Sages, “Seek a beautiful form for the fulfilment of His commandments.”<sup>65</sup> But the form may submerge the essence and too many forms may hide the kernel from view. Let us heed to the saying of Hillel: “He who makes a worldly use of the crown of the Torah, shall waste away.”

The fulfilment of the Torah is the crown of Israel's life. This Torah must illuminate our spirit and warm our hearts. To debase it, by making it a service of mere formalism, whether it be of partisan Orthodoxy or of partisan Radicalism, is to make a worldly use of the Crown of the Torah. Envelop the crown in worthy fashion; provide the essence with an expressive form, and you will demonstrate that you have studied and have not forgotten; that you have learned to combine and blend harmoniously the piety of the past with the modern sense of beauty. To pro-

duce this harmony intelligently, and in a way calculated to inspire love for Judaism, is the grateful task of our day. And here, again, the words of Hillel are rich in inspiring impulse: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

If *we* do not make the effort to preserve the spiritual inheritance which has been handed down to us from the past, so that we, in turn, may transmit it to posterity, who will do it for us? Everyone recognizes the necessity of imbuing Israel with new life. But how this is to be done—here, opinions are so diverse that we almost despair of success in the task. Does not Hillel suggest the proper method? "If I am only for myself, what am I?"

What we possess does not belong to us alone. Before a great discovery or a great idea can become the common property of mankind, hundreds must have labored on the fundamental facts. On these countless laborers do we depend for every blessing we enjoy. So must we not labor for ourselves alone. This fundamental truth has not escaped the keen eye of the Sages:

כמה יגיעות יגע אדם הראשון עד שמצא פת לאכול וכו'

"How many varieties of labor must Adam have performed before he could eat a piece of bread! He must have sowed, reaped, bound sheaves, threshed, sifted, ground, kneaded and baked.

If he wanted a garment, he must have sheared, washed, fulled, spun, and woven. 'For me,' says Ben Zoma, 'I find these things all done for me when I wake up in the morning.' " 66

And is it otherwise with the bread of the spirit and the garment of the soul? "Man liveth not by bread alone." (Deut. viii, 3.) This bread of the spirit must be prepared through the co-operative labor of those who are authorized. So must the garment which is to clothe the soul—the externals of Judaism. But if each one lives only and strives only for himself—seeking only his own personal advantage, what will become of Israel's Torah, of Israel's religion? With intense fanaticism on the one hand and cold indifference on the other, Israel's priceless heritage will trail unheeded in the dust.

Only when the Rabbis of this country shall be moved by a common endeavor for wise moderation, unaffrighted at the "Backwards" cry—which may, after all, be beneficent progress; only when Religion shall again have been restored to the home, where it now lies, sadly neglected; and, speaking generally, only when conservative progress rather than ungovernable speed shall characterize our religious movement, can the outlook for Judaism be hopeful.

The time has come. It is NOW. "If not now,

when?" Never were conditions so opportune as here and to-day. In all civilized countries the Jews are held in honor, regardless of their creed. Orthodox Jews stand in as high esteem as those of Reform tendencies. A Sir Moses Montefiore enjoys the friendship of royalty. Sir Nathaniel Rothschild is a Conservative in Religion. Yet on taking the Oath, kept his head covered. Is he less respected than our Reformers, who, during divine service, worship with uncovered heads?

The times are calling to us: "Bring order out of this chaos." "And if not now, when?" Ye Rabbis, be heedful of the old Talmudic saying:

כל הדוחק את השעה שעה דוחקתו, וכל הנרחק מפני השעה  
שעה נרחק מפניו:

"He who would force the hour, *i.e.*, who would bring things to pass before the time is ready for them, will in all probability fail. He, however, who—recognizing that the opportune time has come, takes advantage of it, will undoubtedly succeed." <sup>67</sup>

The opportune moment cannot be created. It cannot be brought about by violent means; but when it has come, it behooves us to take advantage of it—it may not pass our way again. Let us, then, be up and doing!

## XII

### BE PERSISTENT IN STUDY



LEAVING the maxims of Hillel, the editor of the Mishnah takes us to his renowned opponent, Shammai. His maxim runs as follows:

עשה תורתך קבע, אמור מעט ועשה הרבה והוי מקבל את  
כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות :

“Fix a period for thy study of the Torah; say little and do much; and receive all men with a cheerful countenance.”

In this saying, as in those of Hillel, the author reveals his individuality. In contrast to Hillel, who endeavored to render the fulfilment of the Law easy, Shammai was stern and unyielding. For him, the Law was a stubborn reality that permitted no modification. Characteristic of him is the story of the rigor with which he would have insisted upon his young son's fasting on the Day of Atonement, had not friends interceded on the child's behalf. And yet Shammai was not the austere man that legend portrays. In the maxim

here quoted, he is anything but austere: "Receive all men with a cheerful countenance."

The rigorous views of Shammai, indeed, ceased to prevail in course of time, in the schools of learning which grouped themselves around these two teachers. Altho the *Bath-kol*—the Heavenly Voice—had declared *אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים* "The words of both of them are the words of the living God," in actual practice, *והלכה כבית הלל* "the decision according to the school of Hillel" was followed.<sup>68</sup> This was doubtless due to the fact that the rigor of the school of Shammai grew so burdensome, that it became intolerable; and the Rabbis, wherever possible, avoided overburdening of the people.

אין גוזרין גזירה על הצבור אלא א"כ רוב הצבור יכולין  
לעמוד בה :

"We should only make such enactments as the majority of the community can carry out."<sup>69</sup>

In referring to the views of Shammai, my only object is to call attention to his notable saying: *עשה תורתך קבע* "Fix a period for thy study of the Torah"—words that have a very practical application for ourselves.

Some may object that I am not sufficiently familiar with American conditions, and that it is presumptuous on my part to pass judgment. Well,



I will not presume to pass judgment, but will merely express my individual opinion, the result of my personal experience here—an opinion that I feel, if it be discussed with calm deliberation, will be found to be not without value.

A stranger from abroad, arriving in this great city, is immediately struck by a sight which he would seek in vain in the Old World. He notes the architectural peculiarity of the houses and the methodical sameness and regularity of the streets. Entering one of the dwellings, he at once sees the regularity of the street reproduced, in the arrangement of the rooms, and in the conveniences for comfort everywhere provided, for light, heat and water. If we enter the Jewish temples, synagogues and schoolhouses, however, we find at once a marked contrast to what we have just observed. Here no such similarity of arrangement exists. Light, heat and water—elements equally indispensable in the house of God, are found distributed disproportionately, one or other of these necessities being often not provided for at all. In one, we find only light—much light, glaring light, but no warmth-giving fire of religious emotion. In another, we find only heat—too much heat, the consuming heat of fanaticism, but too little light for the nourishment of mind and soul. And where at times we find the light

of a refined divine service joined to the fire of religious emotion, there is lacking the third element—the soul-cleansing water from which the worshippers emerge, purified from the dust of the workaday world.

כנחלים נטיו, כך בתי מדרשות ובתי כנסיות, בני אדם  
נכנסין לתוכן כשהן מלאין עונות ויוצאין מלאין מצות.

“As streams spread forth,” (Num. xxiv, 6) say the Sages, so is it with Israel’s school-houses and houses of worship; they who enter them, covered with the dust of daily life and sin, leave them, purified and strengthened.” <sup>70</sup>

Who is to blame for the fact that the Judaism of the New World is characterized by so many dissimilarities and differences? I believe that the fault is mainly due to the Rabbis. “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.” (Jud. xvii, 6.) These words, which describe a sad episode in Israel’s ancient history, apply, alas, to our own day. The religious dissensions which prevail in our midst seem to me to have their source in the circumstance that we recognise no authority in matters of Religion. Every *Hazan* plays *Rav* in his congregation, preaches just what he pleases, acts just as it suits him—and so long as the membership is sufficient to guarantee the support of the temple, no one cares.

Then, there is the fact of too much preaching. A great preacher was once asked: "How often should a man preach"? He answered: "A good preacher can deliver a good sermon once a month, a mediocre preacher, twice a month; while a poor preacher can deliver a sermon once a day." Here let it be observed, that the principal occupation of the Rabbi, from the earliest times, has been the pursuit of Jewish learning. Hence, in former days, only special occasions called him into the pulpit. To-day, custom prescribes a weekly oratorical display as the Rabbi's chief task—it is a mere imitation of what obtains in Christian churches, where weekly sermons are demanded. Perhaps the olden times were too niggardly in the matter of sermons, which were expected only on *Sabbath Haggadol* and *Sabbath Shubah*, and at most, a sermon on each of the Holydays; but would not a sermon once every two or three weeks be enough?

Do I make this suggestion for the purpose of easing the labors of the Rabbi? By no means. On the contrary, it would increase them. But it would enable him to pursue the study of the Torah more assiduously. He could then "fix a period for the study of the Torah," and "speaking little," he could "do much."

This condition of things, indeed, obtained in

former times, when there was no distinction between cleric and layman, when every Jew pursued the study of the Torah, when in every house were heard the echoes of that study and where, when the struggle for existence occupied the day, the nights were brought into requisition for that purpose. In such an environment, the words of the ancient Rabbis were fraught with deep meaning:

בית שנשמעין בו דברי תורה בלילה אינו נחרב.

“A house in which the words of Torah are heard at night—such a house will never be destroyed.” <sup>71</sup>

In our day, when the rank and file of our people do not study the Torah as aforetime; when such study is confined almost entirely to the Rabbis; of them, at least, it is expected that they “fix a period for their study of the Torah.” The only qualification of a Rabbi is occupation with the Torah. אי לאו תורה כמה נחמן בר אבא איכא בשוקא. Were it otherwise “Any one in the street could adopt the title.” <sup>72</sup> If our congregations demanded from their spiritual guides adequate rabbinical training as well as a consistent Jewish religious life, not everyone who now calls himself “reverend,” would be permitted to teach God’s word and to exercise rabbinical functions. Our prospects would be brighter. Small congregations would care less for independence. Those of small resources would unite with larger congregations;

and thus would our holy cause be better served. And with the strengthening of our congregations and the conservation of the time of our Rabbis, the cause of humanity would be furthered, and Shammai's last suggestion could be put into practice: "Receive all men with a cheerful countenance." Who, particularly, should be thus received? First and foremost, surely, those dependent upon our aid. Our community supports thirty-six charitable Institutions, which call for the united support of our congregations and Rabbis. If our congregations would only form a Union and our Rabbis did not devote themselves exclusively to preaching sermons, these Institutions could increase their usefulness.

The Rabbis, too, should form a Union—not only for the purpose of bringing them together once a month for the interchange of views, but to promote research in Jewish learning which is now so sadly neglected. Such a Union would do away with much of the petty jealousy which now exists, and check the careers of ignorant and arrogant men who, without authority, assume rabbinical honors. If the vineyard of the Lord were rid of these "little foxes that spoil the vineyard," (Song of Songs, ii, 15.) our synagogues and temples would come to their own and Judaism take on its brightest aspect.

## XIII

### DOUBT AND SUPERSTITION



HERE are truths which cannot be sufficiently emphasized or reiterated too frequently. Such a truth is that expressed by Rabbi Gamaliel:

עשה לך רב והסתלק מן הספק ואל תרבה לעשר אומדות.

“Provide thyself a teacher, keep thyself from doubt, and accustom not thyself to give tithes by a conjectural estimate.”

Why did the Sage repeat the first portion of this saying? Joshua ben Perahiah had already dwelt upon the obligation of providing ourselves with a teacher. The commentators explain this by saying that R. Joshua ben Perahiah referred to the *teacher* by way of contrast to the *friend*, as one from whom we should *learn*; while R. Gamaliel considers him as one authorized to *teach*. This explanation is good as far as it goes, but I believe that a better solution is to be found in a historical episode. In this connection, too, another difficulty must be alluded to.



All the previous aphorisms were prefaced by the words קבל מזהם—"The author received the teaching from some previous teacher." In this manner, the chain of tradition is formed from the men of the Great Synagogue to Hillel and Shammai. Here we should have expected R. Johanan ben Zakkai, who received the tradition from Hillel and Shammai. This is evident from the eighth section of the second chapter of the *Ethics*. But as the Editor, himself one of the Patriarchate, wished to refer now to the followers of Hillel, he does not follow a strict genealogical line, and breaks the chain of tradition.<sup>73</sup> This explains the appearance in this place of Rabbi Gamaliel, and also sheds light upon his maxim.

The religious controversies of Hillel and Shammai had created party-differences in Judaism, which later assumed such dimensions, that "it seemed as if there were two *Torahs*" <sup>74</sup>—נעשה תורה—בשתי תורות, for what the one permitted, the other prohibited. It was feared that the capricious interpretation of the Law would open the door for everyone to expound the Law according to his own whim and fancy. Hence Rabbi Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, felt it necessary to repeat the maxim which had been expressed before under other circumstances, by another authority:

“Provide thyself a teacher,” giving the reason for this repetition—“that thou mayest keep thyself from doubt”—in other words, in order that the teacher, as the authority, may declare the Halachic rule which should be followed in any given case.

If such precaution was necessary in times when the study of the Torah was general and the knowledge of the Torah was widespread, how much more necessary is it in these days, when the study of the Torah is neglected and the supporters of Jewish learning are becoming ever fewer in number! Think of it, it was recently stated in the public prints, that in proportion as the Jews were abandoning Jewish studies, non-Jewish students were taking them up! Is it to be wondered at that mediocrity and superficiality in Jewish knowledge are increasing, and that anyone who has just stepped upon the threshold of Jewish theology feels himself authorized to set himself up as a teacher in Israel, in this New World? Grievous wounds are being inflicted by these nondescript mediocrities.

כי רבים חללים הפילה. זה ת"ח שלא הגיע להוראה ומורה.

“For she hath caused many to fall” (Prov. vii, 26) “this refers,” say the Sages, “To a man who acts as a public teacher without possessing proper qualifications.” <sup>75</sup>

ועצומים כל הרוגיה, זה ת"ח שהגיע להוראה ואינו מורה.

"And countless is the number of those slain by her."—(*Ibid.*) "This refers to those who are qualified to teach, but who, through false modesty and lack of courage, fail to check these shallow impostors."

In former times, public opinion was strong enough to keep unworthy men out of the pulpit.

כל המתנאה בטלית של ת"ח ואינו ת"ח אין מכניסין אותו במחיצתו של הקב"ה.

"A man who merely assumes the garb of a scholar, but who is no scholar, we must not admit into the sacred precincts." <sup>76</sup>

The man of learning, however, who was at the same time a pious man, was held in great esteem.<sup>77</sup> Of him it was said: הוא יאי וגולתיה יאי — "He is worthy and his mantle befits him."

So the Rabbis insisted that "A man should learn before he teaches" <sup>78</sup>—ליגמר אינש והדר ליסבר. Students were exhorted "to be thoroughly prepared before coming into the presence their teachers" <sup>79</sup>—גרוסו מעיקרה מתניתין והדר עולו. They were recommended "to live in the same place as their teachers", <sup>80</sup> so that they could readily obtain information when needed—לעולם ידור אדם במקום רבו. It was no mean advice, therefore, that Rabbi Gamaliel offered,

when he recommended: "Provide thyself a teacher, and keep thyself from doubt."

We need a Rabbi Gamaliel in these days of ours, when half-educated men find it easy to catch the public ear, and when any one feels himself justified in pronouncing any fleeting suggestion that may occur to him as unquestionable truth. In these times, permeated by doubt and distrust in all things religious, when cheap, hollow phrases are made to pass for learning, it were well to bethink ourselves of Rabbi Gamaliel's words: "Provide thyself a teacher, and keep thyself from doubt."

And the last part of Rabbi Gamaliel's maxim is also of practical importance for our times: "Accustom not thyself to give tithes by a conjectural estimate." History repeats itself. We are told that there were people in the olden days who asked:

מאי אהני לן רבנן מעולם לא שרו לן עורבא ולא אסרו לן  
יונה.

"Of what use are Rabbis who will not permit us to eat ravens, and who cannot prohibit the use of pigeons?" <sup>81</sup>

If our Rabbis did their duty conscientiously and with due regard to the Law, preaching in sympathy with its spirit and averse to posing as innovators,

such a condition of affairs could not obtain among ourselves. We are told of a certain Rabbi who lived in Jamnia, who "declared a forbidden animal permitted, and gave a hundred and fifty reasons for his opinion."<sup>82</sup>

תלמיד ותיק היה ביבנה שהיה מטהר את השרץ בק"ן טעמים

We do not need such men of learning. The name of this man has not been handed down to posterity; he was not deserving of such immortality. He is deserving, however, of being remembered, who is able to give reasons whereby the distinction between the permitted and the prohibited may be properly established. Hence, on the same page of the Talmud there is mentioned a celebrated pupil of Rabbi Meir, Symmachos by name, who gave forty-eight reasons for prohibiting a certain thing and a like number of reasons for something that he had declared prohibited.<sup>83</sup>

Let us learn this lesson: Intellectual power and critical acumen are only of value when we utilise them for legitimate purposes. Hence we are warned not to govern ourselves by conjecture, but by the standard of the Law. "Conjecture" will, sooner or later, lead us into error—כל המוסיף גורע  
 "He who adds too much in one case will diminish in another."<sup>84</sup> The Bible furnishes us

with an admirable illustration in the case of Saul, who was so considerate to Amalek, but so cruel to the city of Nob, that the Divine voice was heard in remonstrance: "Be not so pious that ye become wicked." <sup>85</sup>

Do nothing by conjecture, for sooner or later you will commit injustice. And in your religious relations keep away from doubt as you would from credulity. It is just as wrong to wrap one's self in the mantle of agnostic self-complacency—accepting only that which is comprehensible to one's own mind and perceptible to one's own senses, doubting and rejecting everything else—as it is an intellectual narrow-mindedness to believe everything. "The simpleton believeth everything," said the wise Solomon. (Prov. xiv, 15.)

Tranquillity of mind and soul; freedom from doubt and absence of superstition—these are found best in listening to the voice of a teacher who speaks with authority, "neither adding to the word of God, nor taking aught therefrom." (Deut. iv, 2.)



## XIV

### SPEECH AND SILENCE



WO men once appeared before a Roman ruler, to debate the question: "Is speech or silence of greater use and advantage?" The first speaker, a famous orator, pictured in eloquent language the value of speech; how by its means the sorrowing are consoled, the calumniated defended, the doubting convinced, the seeker after wisdom supplied with knowledge, and armies spurred on to victory.

The second speaker then stepped forward, and in a carefully considered address, attempted to refute his opponent's arguments. He contended that silence was of greater use; if utilized generally, mankind would be saved from its greatest miseries—at any rate, men would never betray themselves, if they maintained silence. At this point, he was rudely interrupted by the first speaker: "When I, by means of my oratorical powers, attempted to prove the utility of speech, I was within my legitimate sphere and availed myself of my proper weapon. If my opponent

acted fairly, he would demonstrate the value of silence by remaining silent. As it is, he uses my arguments to prove his thesis."

We are reminded of this anecdote as we approach the saying of Simeon ben Gamaliel:

"All my days I have grown up among the wise, and I have found nothing of better service than silence; not learning but doing is the chief thing; and he who multiplies words causes sin."

The author of this maxim was pre-eminently qualified to express it. He was a man of learning and President of the Sanhedrin, who vacated his chair and participated actively in the struggle against the Romans, and is believed to have fallen a sacrifice to his high courage.

Men of action will probably coincide with our epigrammatist. The scholar, however, who confines himself to the walls of his study, aloof from the surging stream of life, will hardly agree with him.

Is speech or silence of greater use and advantage? The orator would often prefer silence to speech. On many an occasion he feels that "A fool when silent is oft accounted wise." (Prov. xvii, 28.) And yet there are times when silence ceases to be a virtue, when speech is to be commended. It is certainly true in the matter of religious teaching.

כל פיטמא בישין ופיטמא דאוריתא טבין

"All idle chatter is bad, but when indulged in for the Torah it is commendable." <sup>86</sup>

But many of our preachers speak without saying anything. They seem to think that language was made to conceal thought. Such preaching is not to be admired. To-day, indeed, were one merely to consult his own personal interests and peace of mind, he would often remain silent.

לכן המשביל בעת ההיא ידם כי עת רעה היא.

"The prudent doth keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time." (Amos v, 13.) Certain it is, that silence will never bring about so much unhappiness for him as will a bold denunciation of the spirit of the times and a courageous criticism of the customs of the day. Prudence and regard for personal interests may, therefore, dictate silence and abstinence from controversy, but is this an honest and a worthy attitude to pursue?

In worldly matters, it is well enough to observe Solomon's advice: "Go not forth hastily to strive." (Prov. xxv, 8.) Be not hasty in entering into controversy. It is well enough, too, to say with the Talmud:

אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשביל מי שבוים את עצמו בשעת מריבה

"The world only exists through those who in a time of strife keep silence." <sup>87</sup>

But that same Talmud advocates uncompromising speech when Religion is in question.

יכול אף לדברי תורה, ת"ל צדק תדברון

"Does this apply also to religious discussions?" ask the Sages. And they answer "No." As it is said: "Speak ye righteously."

הלומד תורה ואינו מלמדה זה הוא דבר ה' בזה

"He who studies the Torah and does not teach it to others, of such a one it is said 'he hath despised the word of the Lord'." (Numb. xv, 31.)<sup>88</sup>

Speech, then, is to be commended, when used for religious admonition. If the Rabbi fails to admonish those whom it is his duty to admonish, he is guilty of a sin of omission.

But there is a speech even more commendable. It is the speech of ACTION. The most perfect oratory is not to be compared with it. The art of speech is often shown as much by what it conceals as by what it reveals. Hence the preacher will often avoid the things that may be resented by his hearers and for which he may be called to account. Discretion urges that "Silence pays better than speech"<sup>89</sup>—שתיקות יפה מדבור—<sup>90</sup>—that "If speech is worth a *sela*, silence is worth double"<sup>90</sup>—מלה בסלע משתוקה בתריין—and many a preacher in our day is paid more for what he does not say,

than for what he says. That sermon, however, is the best which leads to action. That is what our maxim drives home to us: "Not learning is the chief thing, but doing"—not theory, but practice; "and he who multiplies words causes sin"—abundant professions may go hand in hand with the gravest error, but he whose good deeds speak for him, needs no other justification.

Judaism is primarily and supremely a religion of DEED. It is not a religion of phrases, however high-sounding, but of living acts.

At the time of the persecutions under Hadrian, when the study of the Law and the practice of its behests were punished by death, a number of renowned men assembled at a certain house, where they discussed the question:

תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול ?

"Is the study of the Law or the practice of its precepts of greater consequence?" If we are to suffer martyrdom for one or other of these, for which shall it be? Opinions differed. R. Tarfon pleaded for the practice of Religion; R. Akiba maintained that the theory was most essential; and his opinion prevailed:

נענו כולם ואמרו תלמוד גדול, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה

"The study of the Law is of greater consequence, for study leads to action."<sup>91</sup>

Akiba brilliantly exemplified his opinion that "theory is the mother of practice," in his own life. We are told that he traveled to many of the large cities in Asia Minor, teaching the Torah and awakening the Jews to a proud consciousness of their obligations. He died a martyr's death as the result of his zeal.

Should we, fortunate children of a happier time, not rejoice in the fulfilment of the divine commands, for which our fathers willingly surrendered even life itself? How true are the words of Moses, that when the peoples of the earth shall see how we "observe and keep" the commandments of God, they will say of us: "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!" (Deut. iv, 6.) But, alas, in certain Jewish circles "wisdom and understanding" are identified with the non-observance of the Mosaic Law, and with the disregard of the religious ordinances which have been the very life of Judaism. Our elders have made great sacrifices and much effort has been expended to arrange and beautify our Temple services, yet the truth must be told—an honest Rabbi cannot conceal it—that the religion of the home and its practice in the daily life are not what they should be.

True, a Rabbi is not the keeper of the conscience of the members of his congregation. It is claimed



to-day that the private lives of Jews are no business of the Rabbi, but are matters between the individual and his God—הנסתרות לה' אלהינו. But it must not be forgotten that we owe a duty to posterity, which duty calls to us to fulfil the words of the Torah:

והנגלות לנו ולבנינו עד עולם לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת

That which is done in private may be of private concern—a matter between a man and his God; but parents, remember your responsibility for what you do in your homes, in the presence of your children. You owe it to your children not to rob them of the heritage of their fathers. To them you are accountable, and through them to the world, to which they belong as well as to you. To acknowledge this duty only in theory, and not to fulfil it in practice, is a dangerous hypocrisy.

We are living in a free country and can carry out all the precepts of our religion without let or hindrance. Should we not prove ourselves faithful? In the sacred scroll, the letters of the words לנו ולבנינו are dotted, as if to emphasize them. (Deut., xxix, 28.) Let us emphasize them, too.

Ever mindful of the fact that “Not learning but doing is the chief thing”—not abstract theory,

nor abstruse philosophy, but the vital deed, let us strengthen our Jewish religious life, to our own weal and happiness, as well as to that of our children. May this be "our wisdom in the sight of the peoples," now and for all time!

## XV

### TRUTH, JUSTICE AND PEACE



AS the traveller who has overcome many obstacles during his journey rejoices when he reaches a rocky eminence, where he can rest from his fatigue and survey the ground he has traversed, though well aware that he has hardly covered a fifth of the road to his journey's end, are we to-day. Many are the difficulties of exposition which we had to conquer before completing the explanation of the fifth part of the subject in hand—an exposition of the Ethics of the Fathers.

We are glad that we have reached a resting-place from which we can survey the path we have trodden, and measure the road that still stretches before us. Involuntarily our vision strays backward to our starting-point and gladly finds, despite the many side-journeys we have made, an intimate connection between our point of departure and our temporary resting-place. This connection we find in the maxim of Simon the Just, according to which, the moral world rests

upon three pillars: "The Torah, Divine Worship, and the Practice of Charity," considered in conjunction with the maxim of Simeon ben Gamaliel:

"By three things is the world preserved: by Truth, by Judgment and by Peace. As it is said: 'Judge ye the truth and the judgment of peace in your gates.'" (Zech. viii, 16.)

The two sayings supplement each other. Simon the Just speaks of the foundations of the moral world in general terms; while Simeon ben Gamaliel discusses the practical application of these great principles to life, to the conduct of man toward his fellow-man.

The Torah, the first pillar on which the world rests, supports it only by virtue of the fact that it is based on Truth<sup>92</sup>—אמת זו תורה. Divine Worship, the second pillar, is only a reality—an effective support of the moral world, when we judge ourselves with rigorous exactness<sup>93</sup>—כל דבר המסור כל לב נאמר בו ויראת מאלהיך. And the third pillar, the Practice of Charity, is only a pillar of the moral world, when its ultimate aim is Peace.

Looking now at these principles in detail, we observe that the ideas of Truth, Justice and Peace are intimately connected and supplement each other.

Foremost stands Truth—Society's strongest and most indispensable support. There is a

story told in the Talmud of a city, named Kushta. It derived its name from the fact that none of its inhabitants had ever told an untruth. No death ever occurred in that city. On one occasion, however, two children died. Investigation disclosed that the mother of the children had told a lie; whereupon the inhabitants pleaded with her to leave the city, lest punishment for her sin light upon them.<sup>94</sup> A pretty conceit, in truth! Its homiletical application to ourselves is apparent. If we observed rigorously the moral and religious truths, there would be no need to deplore moral decadence or the dying out of the Jewish religious life. Were Truth our guide in all things, nothing could remove us from our firm foundation.

The Sages have expressed this in a playful explanation of the formation of the letters that compose the word אמת, which they contrast, in similar fashion, with its opposite שקר.

שיקרא אחרא כרעיה קאי ואמת מלבן לבוניה

“*Sheker* stands but on one foot, while *Emeth* stands on a broad foundation”.<sup>95</sup> The three points of the letter ש run together and are connected in top-heavy fashion, the letter appearing to stand on one foot. The letter ק runs down, with its slender limb below its body, and the letter ר has only one feeble support. Not so the

letters of אמת. Here the letters are well supported; they rest on a firm foundation. "Verily," say the Sages, קושטא קאי שיקרא לא קאי "Truth stands firmly and remains, forever, while Falsehood Perishes."

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,—  
The eternal years of God are hers;  
But Error, wounded, writhes with pain,  
And dies among his worshippers."

The Rabbis have another saying: חותמו של "God's seal is Truth".<sup>96</sup> A seal makes innumerable impressions without variation. If Truth, then, is a seal, how comes it that to-day there are so many contradictory things, each claiming to be God's truth? The answer is furnished by דין—"Justice," the complement of אמת—"Truth," the second pillar on which the moral world rests. If Justice were, indeed, our guide, we would quickly arrive at an understanding concerning Truth. But when, in our religious affairs, the proposition is laid down as a starting point, that Moses, when he made his laws, had only his own times in view and that if he had lived in our day, he would have prescribed entirely different regulations <sup>97</sup>—or, to use the words of the Talmud:

משימין משה רבינו חכם ותורתו אמת ואומרין אילו היה יורע  
משה רבינו שיהיה ריוח בדבר לא היה כותבו —



we must insist that the premises are false and the conclusion necessarily false also. If we are honest in our investigation, Justice being the judge, firmly maintaining מוחלפת אינה תורה—that the Torah, as God's teaching, cannot be changed, our conclusions would be different; and those who now preach error would no longer be tolerated.

Planting our feet firmly, then, on the principle מה ראה משה אמת ראה that "Whatever Moses saw under the influence of divine inspiration, is the truth",<sup>98</sup>—our feet thus standing on a firm foundation, we may and at times must make concessions in matters that do not affect the vital principles of Judaism. Then we can approach Peace, the third pillar on which the moral world rests; and as did the Sages in olden times, permit some things מפני דרכי שלום "for the sake of peace."

Here, if anywhere, honesty, love of truth and tact are eminently demanded, so that that which is permitted be not refused and apparent differences be properly reconciled. Discussing the verse: "Who is as the wise man, and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing"? (Eccles. viii, 1.)—setting everything in its true light—the Rabbis remark: <sup>99</sup> מי בהקב"ה שיודע לעשות פשרה "Who but God can do this"? God is called the great peace-maker. "He maketh peace in His high heavens

and ordereth the way of the stars in their heavenly courses.” (Job xxv, 2.)

So must we, here below, in *our* ordained spheres of action, establish peace, reconciling the ancient and the modern, without violating the fundamental principles of Judaism. In this spirit it was said: *יפה כח פשרה מכה הרין*, “Peaceful reconciliation is better than stern justice.”<sup>100</sup> That is why the verse is quoted in our Mishnah: “Judge ye the truth and the judgment of peace in your gates.” (Zech. viii, 16.)

But is this possible? If strict Justice is what we have in view, shall we have Peace? And if Peace be our aim will Justice obtain? They can and they will be reconciled, if Justice is not stubborn and makes concessions to Peace, and if Peace is something more than mere thoughtless indulgence and seeks a judicial basis.<sup>101</sup>

הלא במקום שיש משפט אין שלום ובמקום שיש שלום אין משפט... אלא הוי אומר זה בצוע.

When, then, may we permit modification—modification that is *לפנים משורת הדין* “within the strict interpretation of the Law”? The answer is simple and unequivocal. In the fundamental truths of the Torah there can be no modification, no compromise; but in non-essentials, “interpretation” may be invoked and modification of

established rules permitted. Opinions alter and manners change; we must take account of altered conditions.<sup>102</sup>

תורה דכתיב בה אמת, דכתיב אמת קנה ואל תמכר, אין  
הקב"ה עושה לפנינו משורת הדיון. דיון, דלא כתיב ביה  
אמת, הקב"ה עושה לפנינו משורת הדיון.

Let me illustrate this, by the question of the Prayer-Book, that is now raging in our midst. The old *Siddur* no longer satisfies. We need a new one, and many are they who are ready to supply the demand. But how? One would remove all trace of Hebrew; another would allow *some* Hebrew, endeared to memory, to remain—a *זכר* to the old; still another, would improve the good, old Biblical expressions; and so on, to the end of the chapter.

If we could arrange a Prayer-Book in the language and on the lines of the old, that would appeal to modern taste, a Prayer-Book that would be acceptable to and adopted by modern congregations, we might legitimately make concessions to the spirit of the times.

אחר המרבה ואחר הממעיט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים.

"Whether one prays much or little matters not, provided that a man incline his heart to the Father in Heaven."<sup>103</sup>

Words, after all, only express the feelings of the

heart; <sup>104</sup> אחר כונת הלב הן הן הדברים—and many passages could safely be omitted from the old Prayer-Book, because they do not express devotional feeling. A uniform Prayer-Book would at once put an end to one great source of strife and contention in our midst, and be a prelude to a lasting peace.

And Peace is so often praised in the Prayer-Book. Every prayer concludes with the word *Shalom*—"peace." The Mishnah ends the same way; and so does our first section of the Ethics. As so will I conclude with the words of the Mishnah:

לא מצא הקב"ה בלי מחזיק ברכה אלא השלום, שנאמר  
ה' עוז לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום.

"When God desired to bless Israel, he could find no more suitable instrument than Peace. As it is said: 'When God granted strength to His people, he blessed his people with peace.'" <sup>105</sup>



## NOTES

1. Abodah Zarah 17 b.—*Editor*.
2. Midrash Rabba Song of Songs, Chap. VI, v. 7.—*Editor*.
3. Berachoth 31 a, and Baba Bathra 60 b.—*Editor*.
4. Pesachim 49 b.—*Editor*.
5. Baba Bathra 60 b.—*Editor*.
6. The *Shi'ur Komah* is a Kabbalistic work, of uncertain date, which discusses the dimensions of the body of God and of its several parts. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s. v.—*Editor*.
7. Gittin 13 a.—*Editor*.
8. Bezah 2 b.—*Editor*.
9. A homiletical interpretation of the word *Shenoth*.—*Editor*.
10. Baba Bathra 131 a.—*Editor*.
11. Sabbath 112 b.—*Editor*.
12. Yalkut Psalms §873.—*Editor*.
13. Tanchuma Bereshith I.—*Editor*.
14. Pesikta Rabbathi §21, 99 b.—*Editor*.
15. Sabbath 119 b.—*Editor*.
16. Hagigah 14 b.—*Editor*.
17. Midrash Tanchuma, beginning of כִּי תָבוֹא. See also Pesikta d'R. Kahana, ed. Buber, folio 102 a.—*Editor*.
18. It has been admirably suggested that by the term פֶּרֶם, usually translated "wages" or "reward," is meant the monthly allowance of food which, in olden times, constituted the recompense of the slave.—*Editor*.
19. Berachoth 5 b.—*Editor*.
20. Berachoth 33 b.—*Editor*.
21. In ancient times, pupils sat at the feet of their teachers.—*Editor*.
22. Jerushalmi Shekalim, Chap. II, 5.—*Editor*.
23. Kiddushin 33 a.—*Editor*.
24. Makkoth 22 b.—*Editor*.
25. Kiddushin 33 a.—*Editor*.
26. Berachoth 33 a; also Sanhedrin 92 a.—*Editor*.
27. Yebamoth 109 b.—*Editor*.
28. Sabbath 14 a.—*Editor*.



29. Aboda Zarah 54 b.—*Editor*.
30. Kethuboth 105 b.
31. Nedarim 37 a.—*Editor*.
32. Baba Kamma 85 a.—*Editor*.
33. Pesachim 52 b.
34. Baba Bathra 16 b.—*Editor*.
35. Erubin 47 b.—*Editor*.
36. Sabbath 127 b.—*Editor*.
37. Megillah 28 a.—*Editor*.
38. Sukkah 56 b.—*Editor*.
39. Sanhedrin 111 b.—*Editor*.
40. Jerus. Peah, I, 1.—*Editor*.
41. Taanith 7 a.
42. Sanhedrin 107 a.
43. Yebamoth 79 a.
44. Kiddushin 40 a.
45. Berachoth 19 b.
46. Nega'im, Chap. IX, 3.
47. Yesode Hattorah, Chap. V, v. 1.
48. Berachoth 8a.—*Editor*.
49. Pesachim 113 a.
50. Derech Erez Zutta, Chap. XI.
51. Yoma 9 b.
52. *Ibid*.
53. Pesachim 87 b.—*Editor*.
54. Sabbath 119 b.
55. *Ibid*.
56. Baba Bathra 60 b.—*Editor*.
57. Yalkut Isaiah §445.—*Editor*.
58. Jerus. Berachoth, Chap. II, 4. Also Midrash Echah Zutta, ed.  
Buber, 2nd Version at the beginning.—*Editor*.
59. Yalkut Naso §711.
60. End of Makkoth.
61. Rashi to Genesis, XI, 7.—*Editor*.
62. Jerus. Berachoth, Chap IX, at end.
63. Berachoth 64.
64. Berachoth 43 b.
65. Sabbath 133 b.—*Editor*.
66. Berachoth 58 a.

67. Berachoth 64.
68. Erubin 13 b.
69. Baba Kamma 79 b.
70. Yalkut Balak §771.
71. Erubin 18 b.
72. Kiddushin 33 a.
73. See Tossafoth Yomtov.
74. Sanhedrin 88 b.—*Editor*.
75. Sotah 22 a.
76. Baba Bathra 98 a.
77. Baba Bathra 111 a.
78. Sabbath 63 a.
79. Kerithoth 6 a.
80. Berachoth 8 a.
81. Sanhedrin 99 b—100 a.
82. Erubin, 13 b.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Sanhedrin 29 a.
85. Yoma 22 b.
86. Jerus. Berachoth, at end of treatise.
87. Chullin 89 a.
88. Sanhedrin 99 a.
89. Yebamoth 65 a.
90. Megillah 18 a.
91. Kiddushin 40 b.
92. Berachoth 5 b.
93. Baba Mezia 58 b.
94. Sanhedrin 97 a.
95. Sabbath 104 a.
96. Sabbath 55 a.
97. Baba Mezia 75 b.
98. Sanhedrin 111 a.
99. Berachoth 10 a.
100. Sanhedrin 5 b.
101. Sanhedrin 6 b.—*Editor*.
102. Aboda Zarah 4 b.
103. Berachoth 5 b.
104. Megillah 20 a.
105. Ukzin, III, 12.











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